



*Seagull*

# **Democracy in Euroregion Baltic**

**- an overview of the  
current conditions in the nine  
member regions**

*Daniel Folkesson*

**Seagull Report 1-2003**

The report can be ordered from The Regional Council in Kalmar County, Box 762, SE-391 27 Kalmar, Sweden, +46-480-44 83 30, [info@kalmar.regionforbund.se](mailto:info@kalmar.regionforbund.se)

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# Preface

The Euroregion Baltic (ERB) cooperation started in 1998. Since then the nine neighbouring partner-regions in Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden have established close contacts on the political level. After considerable preparations during 2001 the ERB Board and Council decided that it was time to develop the ERB cooperation to be more active and concrete. A decision was made to apply for EU funding of a project with the aim to deepen and concretise the ERB cooperation. The central objective of the Seagull project, approved in May 2002 by the Decision Committee of the Baltic Sea Region Interreg IIIB programme, is to work out a joint strategy for the long-term development and a more concrete Joint Transnational Development Programme (JTDP) for the entire region. The JTDP is planned to contain the most important cornerstones that are considered necessary for sustainable development of the ERB. The JTDP, to be adopted by the ERB Board and Council and by all member-regions, will form the basis for pre-feasibility studies resulting in investment proposals of key interest for the region and its cooperating partners.

To be able to work effectively together towards a joint JTDP, it is of course very important that each partner, its politicians and experts, has proper knowledge about the preconditions affecting the involvement of other partners and their representatives. This is why the first step in the Seagull project contains mapping of conditions and aspects prevailing in each region, crucial for the work towards a JTDP. Mapping activities have therefore, beside the subject considered in this Democracy report, been carried out also concerning Regional strategies, Gender equality, Statistics/GIS, Water quality, Innovative environments and Rural development issues.

The Democracy report gives an overview of the present democratic structures in the different countries and their background based on a few strategic parameters in accordance with the western European conception of representative democracy.

The report thus gives information crucial for the process now entered in the Seagull project towards a JTDP. The report will be the starting point for continued discussions about democratic conditions in the ERB member regions. Responsible for its contents is Mr. Daniel Folkesson, Head of The Institute for Local and Regional Democracy in Växjö, Sweden.

Concerning data and other information in part 1 and 2 of the report, the texts and figures have been controlled by each project partner. When it comes to the comments in part 3, the author is solely responsible for them.

We look forward to the discussions to come within the scope of the Seagull project, on the basis of the distinct presentations in this report.

Kalmar in November 2003

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*Project Coordinator*  
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# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
Background and objectives of the report	9
Democracy - a common used word with several definitions	10
Used methods and sources of information	10
Structure of the report	11
<b>Basic data and statistics for each of the six ERB countries as a whole</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Presentation of the democracy in the ERB member-regions, country by country</b>	<b>15</b>
Denmark: Regional Municipality of Bornholm	15
Latvia: Baltic Sea Coastal Planning Region/Kurzeme Region	21
Lithuania: Klaipeda County	27
Poland: Pomeranian Region and Warmia-Masurian Region	33
Russia: Kaliningrad Region	41
Sweden: The Counties of Blekinge, Kalmar and Kronoberg	49
<b>Some concluding remarks regarding the democracy in Euroregion Baltic</b>	<b>57</b>
Background of today's democracy	57
Political institutions and administrative division	58
Financial conditions	60
The ordinary citizen and ways to take part in the political process	60
The future – problems, possibilities and views on the European Union	61
<b>Comments on the statistics</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Reference list</b>	<b>65</b>



# Introduction

## **Background and objectives of the report**

The study is conducted within the framework of the Baltic Sea Region Interreg IIIB project Seagull-DevERB. The project focuses on the establishment of a Joint Transnational Development Programme (JTDP) for the south-eastern part of the Baltic Sea Region and the mutual cooperation around the three specific areas Water Management, Innovative Environments and Rural Development. The project involves public, private and voluntary actors on both local and regional level in the six countries that are cooperating through the transnational organ Euroregion Baltic (ERB); that is Denmark (Regional Municipality of Bornholm), Latvia (Baltic Sea Coastal Planning Region/Kurzeme Region), Lithuania (Klaipeda County), Poland (Pomeranian Region and Warmia-Masurian Region), Russia (Kaliningrad Region) and Sweden (the Counties of Blekinge, Kalmar and Kronoberg). The cooperation through the Seagull project was introduced by the fall 2002 and will continue until mid of 2005.

The actual Democracy report, which will give input to the process of working out the JTDP, has been compiled by Daniel Folkesson, Head of The Institute for Local and Regional Democracy, during 2002-2003 (project milestones 1 and 2). The study aims at giving an extensive picture of the democracy situation around the Baltic Sea and proving knowledge about how each of the six cooperating countries has chosen to organise self-government, political structures and institutions, civic engagement etc. At foremost, the study highlights conditions on the local and regional level in the nine ERB member-regions, and depicts both quantitative and qualitative knowledge from the perspective of the political as well as the civil society.

It is important to underline that the report must be seen as an overview - just grasping on the surface - mapping major and most evident characteristics of the democracy organised in the six countries. Also, it is very important to emphasise that the aim is *not* to compare the different Euroregion Baltic members or to point out that one region is “better” or “more democratic” than another. On the contrary, the study aims at showing that the democratic system can be organised in different well-functioning ways depending on country-specific history, traditions, values and demands.

Another wish with the Democracy report, also important to mention, is that it will serve as a tool for the individual Seagull participant and all other persons active or interested in the ERB cooperation to gain increased information and knowledge about the partners that are involved in the actual project or other parts of the ERB cooperation. The definition of the word “democracy” and what local self-government really means can widely differ from one political context to another and this is, probably, something very important to keep in mind in future transnational meetings, discussions and joint decision-making.

### **Democracy – a common used word with several definitions**

As just stated above, the definition of the word democracy sometimes differs from one country to another, but also from one political level to another and even from one person to another. Some might say that the democracy should be defined and valued from an elite perspective with elected political representatives making decisions on behalf of the citizens, while instead others emphasise the public participation and the active involvement of ordinary citizens as a characteristic for a well-functioning democratic system. Others might want to highlight the paradigm “individual contra state” or “substance contra process” in order to describe the word in a proper way. It is, however, very important to underline that one extreme of a specific paradigm can never exclude or replace features of the other extreme. The indirect - representative - democratic approach can, in this way, never rule out the more direct elements of the modern democracy (or vice versa), meaning that both extremes must be considered and carefully taken into account in a comprehensive examination. According to this, the representative and the direct democratic approaches should be seen as *supplementing elements* in today’s democracy - *not* as competing extremes impossible to combine.

No further examination of democratic paradigms or methodical extremes will be done in this report. Instead, in the following pages the word democracy is used in a broad sense, focusing on characteristics that are of importance for both the civil and political society. Political structures and institutions as well as conditions for parties and political decision-making are of great interest, but also the prerequisites for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and supplementary ways for individual citizens to take part in the political process.

### **Used methods and sources of information**

The study combines both *quantitative* sources of information, such as books, reports, statistics, newsletters, databases and Internet sites, and *qualitative* knowledge, collected via semi-structured interviews with political representatives, civil servants, NGOs and different kinds of experts

from the six ERB countries. Altogether, 32 persons have been interviewed - individually or in group - sometimes in English or Swedish and sometimes with assistance from authorised interpreters. A list of all the interviewees is, together with the used quantitative sources of information, presented in the reference list in the end of the report.

In the text, different sources of information are used simultaneously and overlapping each other. No direct quotations are made, but if an individual opinion or judgement is presented this is clearly marked.

### **Structure of the report**

The report is structured in three separate parts to depict and analyse the democracy in the nine cooperating regions around the Baltic Sea.

#### *1. Basic data and statistics for each of the six ERB countries as a whole*

This part serves as an overview of the national level and enables some basic comparisons between the six countries regarding political organisations and institutions, administrative division, social conditions and practical organisation of the democracy.

#### *2. Presentation of the democracy in the ERB member-regions, country by country*

This part takes a closer look at the democracy - principally on the local and regional level - in Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The presentation is structured in the same way for each of the six countries, focusing on the following five issues:

- a. Background of today's democracy
- b. Political institutions and administrative division
- c. Financial conditions
- d. The ordinary citizen and ways to take part in the political process
- e. The future - problems, possibilities and views on the European Union

#### *3. Some concluding remarks regarding the democracy in Euroregion Baltic*

In this final part the aim is to highlight some major, important and interesting similarities and differences between the six ERB countries. The conclusions will briefly reflect findings from part 1 and 2, and focus on democratic aspects observed on the local, regional as well as on the national level. This third part will also facilitate some personal reflections from the author and, in this way, provide basic input to the process of establishing the JTDP.

# Basic data and statistics

Aspects of democracy and political institutions	Denmark	Latvia
Capital	Copenhagen	Riga
Area (square km)	43 094	64 589
Population (millions)	5,4	2,4
Population growth rate (%)	0,29	-0,77
Urban population (%)	85	69
Largest ethnic groups (%)	Danish (+ Inuit and Faroese) 96	Latvian 58, Russian 30, Byelorussian 4
Average length of life, men/women (years)	74,3/79,7	63,1/75,2
Form of government	Monarchy	Republic with President
Head of State	Margrethe II	V. Vike-Freiberga
Election term, Head of State (years)	Hereditary	4
Last/Next election, Head of State (year)	-	1999/2003
Participation in election, Head of State (%)	-	-
Head of Government	A. Fogh Rasmussen	E. Repse
Election term, national parliament (years)	4	4
Last/Next election, national parliament (year)	2001/2005	2002/2006
Participation in election, national parliament (%)	87	55
Legislative branch, national level	Unicameral parliament	Unicameral parliament
Number of seats, national parliament (+ senate/fed.council)	179	100
Two biggest parties, national parliament (%)	Liberal Party 31, Social Democrats 29	New Times Party 26, For Human Rights in a United Latvia 24
Voting age	18	18
Share of men/women in the national government (%)	59/41	93/7
Number of regions/counties	13	5
Number of districts	-	26
Number of municipalities	271	547

<sup>1</sup> See "Comments on the statistics", page 63, for remarks and explanations regarding the presented data in this matrix.

– for each of the six ERB countries as a whole<sup>1</sup>

<b>Lithuania</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>Sweden</b>
Vilnius	Warsaw	Moscow	Stockholm
65 300	312 685	17 075 200	449 964
3,6	38,6	145,0	8,9
-0,25	-0,02	-0,33	0,02
68	65	77	83
Lithuanian 81, Russian 9, Polish 7	Polish 97, German 1, Ukrainian 1	Russian 82, Tatar 4, Ukrainian 3	Swedish 89, Finnish 2
63,5/75,6	69,5/78,1	62,3/73,0	77,2/82,6
Republic with President	Republic with President	Republic with President	Monarchy
R. Paksas	A. Kwasniewski	V. Putin	Carl XVI Gustaf
5	5	4	Hereditary
2002/2007	2000/2005	2000/2004	-
53	61	69	-
A. Brazauskas	L. Miller	M. Kasyanov	G. Persson
4	4	4	4
2000/2004	2001/2005	1999/2003	2002/2006
59	46	62	80
Unicameral parliament	Bicameral system with parliament and senate	Bicameral system with parliament and fed. council	Unicameral parliament
141	460 (+100)	450 (+178)	349
Social Democratic Coalition 37, Liberal Union 24	Demo. Left All./Union of Labour 47, Citizens Platform 14	Communist Party of the Russian Fed. 25, Unity 16	Social Democrats 41, Conservative Party 16
18	18	18	18
94/6	88/12	92/8	57/43
10	16	89	21
-	373	-	-
60	2 489	> 12 200	290



# Denmark

## Regional Municipality of Bornholm

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### Regional democracy in figures *Regional Municipality of Bornholm*

Number of inhabitants	44 000
Number of Municipalities	1
Last/Next election, Regional Council	2002/2005
Number of Members, Regional Council	27
Participation, last election, Reg. Council	79 %
Governance, Regional Council:	Coalition, Soc.Dem./ Local Citizens list

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### **Background of today's democracy**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the Danish form of government went through several dramatic changes. As a result of public requests the King in 1849 decided to split his power with a new national parliament with two chambers. This reform gave about 75 % of all grown-up men the right to vote. Even though younger persons, the poorest social groups and - of course - all the women were not allowed to take part in the political life, many people might say that this was the very first stage in the establishment of the Danish democracy. The new reform, however, experienced a severe backlash already 15 years after the adoption when Denmark witnessed losses - for example the southern part Jutland - in the war of 1864. This meant that the realisation of the more modern definition of parliamentarism had to wait until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1915 the universal suffrage was given all Danish men and women.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the local, regional and national democracy continued to develop and experienced both successes and difficulties. Just like in the other Nordic countries the organisation of democracy in Denmark has been characterised by a comprehensive public welfare system, corporativistic solutions and a political culture based on understanding as well as extensive cooperation. During the 1970s the political landscape went through many changes with the new EU membership (1973) and the establishment of several new political parties, which made it almost

impossible for one single party to form a strong and resistant government. At the time, an administrative reform was carried through which meant that the 1388 municipalities (kommuner) and the 25 counties (amt) were heavily reduced in numbers. Since the reform, which was introduced in 1970, minor adjustments have occurred, with the new structural “pilot project” on Bornholm as one of the most interesting (see below).

After the economical recovery in the 1980s, Denmark was during the major part of the 1990s ruled by a government lead by the Social Democrats. The support from the citizens altered, however, heavily in the national election 2001, which meant that Anders Fogh Rasmussen of the Liberal Party - “Venstre” - became the new prime minister in Denmark.

### **Political institutions and administrative division**

Denmark is a constitutional monarchy with the queen - Margrethe II - as the chief of state and the prime minister as the head of government. The latter, who appoints the cabinet, represents the political party/ies that form the government after the national election. The election period is normally four years but the prime minister is entitled to shorten this period if necessary. In the national election all Danish citizens from 18 years of age get to choose among a range of political parties (and party candidates). In the election of 2001 the number of political parties in the unicameral parliament - “Folketinget” - was reduced from ten to eight since two parties no longer got enough support to manage the relative low threshold limit set to 2 %.

In Denmark there are two sub-national tiers with different kind of duties and competences. *The kommune* is the Danish municipality and *the amt* is the county (or region). Denmark’s wide-ranging local government reform of 1970 brought a reallocation of responsibilities between state, counties and municipalities based on the principle that all issues should be solved as close to the individual citizens as possible. The result was that the two sub-national levels now provide the majority of the citizen-focused public services, either by delivering them directly or through contracted providers. The central state should, according to this, just set up general frames and outlines regarding the content of the local services and, in this way, decentralise implementation and the more specific decision-making to the local authorities.

*The Municipality.* The kommune is the smallest geographical unit and holds about 20 000 inhabitants on average. The primary tasks for the 271 municipalities in Denmark include primary education, care for children and elderly people, housing, primary health care, cultural activities, physical

planning and investments, social care etc. The Danish municipalities have the right to levy their own taxes in order to get direct financing to all the welfare services that are carried out, which in many ways enhance the local self-government and the independence from the state. Every fourth year, in November, the citizens have the opportunity to participate in the election to the local councils - "kommunalbestyrelserne" - which are the decision-making bodies of the municipalities. The local councils are obliged to have between five and 25 members, who represent political parties or the citizens list (see below) and are appointed proportionally. The council elects a chairman among its members, who becomes the official mayor in the municipality. The mayor is functioning *both* as a political *and* administrative leader and his or her duties are - among other things - to prepare, call and chair all meetings of the local council, to lead the everyday work in the municipality, to ensure that decisions are executed etc. The mayor's very strong role in the Danish local democracy is relatively unique in comparison to the other Nordic systems. The combination of being the chairman of the council *and* the leader of the local administration is, however, rare also in an international perspective. The Local Government Act states that the council must set up one financial committee and, at least, one other permanent committee, which are to be responsible for the administration of local authority tasks. Normally, an administrative department is tied to each political committee and it might be important to underline that the administrative staff is not politically chosen, but hired on basis of qualification.

*The County.* The second tier of the Danish administrative division is the county or the amt, holding about 335 000 inhabitants on average. The primary tasks for the 13 amts include hospitals and health insurances, care of physically disabled persons, upper secondary schools, cultural activities and regional development etc. The county is not hierarchically positioned above the municipality, but the two bodies work beside each other often in a close cooperative manner with clearly defined tasks and responsibilities. The political organisation of the amt is in many ways similar to the organisation of the kommune. The elections to the counties and the municipalities are always held on the same day - the national election, however, is in most cases arranged separately - and in both cases appointed representatives take place in the council, which is the highest legislative institution. Just as the municipal council the county council appoints its mayor/chairman, who becomes the most obvious political and administrative leader in the amt. Among the different committees - mandatory and voluntary - the financial committee is the most important, responsible for the overall budget.

Since the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2003 the region of Bornholm is functioning nor as a traditional amt nor as a traditional kommune, but as a new entity which combines the competences, rights, duties and responsibilities of the two institutions described above. The structural reform became the result of a several years long discussion on the island and a local referendum in May 2001 where 74 % voted for and 26 % against a reorganisation from five municipalities to one single “regionskommune”. The reasons behind the new entity were quite many. First of all the regionskommune is supposed to provide local welfare services in a more economic and qualitative way than before. At the same time there is a rational argument which highlights a tighter and more professional political as well as administrative organisation, and more effective ways to make democratic decisions. Another wish has been to strengthen the competitiveness and mark Bornholm as an attractive region, in order to gain regional development in positive ways. According to Mr. Niels Chresten Andersen at the EU Secretariat and Carrefour, the new entity is a unique structural project in Denmark. Nowhere else a local/regional institution has got as much competence as the one on Bornholm.

Traditionally there have been a great number and variety of political parties in Denmark - on local and regional level as well as nationally - which has contributed to fragile coalitions, national re-elections and shifts of government over the past decades. In a wider perspective the parties have, however, been relatively stable institutions with organised structures and ideological roots. In the municipal democracy the political parties have often been accompanied by the so-called citizens list - “borgerlisten” - which functions as a complement to the traditional party organisation. The list is currently represented in the regional council on Bornholm and has got eight out of the 27 political mandates. The list works more or less independently of traditional ideological values and tends to attract voters who are disappointed of the fixed organisation around stable political parties.

### **Financial conditions**

In order to finance the welfare services that are provided, the Danish municipalities and counties have got the right to levy taxes from the citizens, which in turn is something fundamental for an independent and well-functioning self-government. Formally the kommune and the amt are free to decide the level of taxation, but specific directives from the state indicate how much the level is allowed to increase from one year to another. Today, the total income tax for an average Danish wage earner is approximately 33 % - the municipality levies about two thirds of this sum and the amt one third. This tax is the foremost important source of income

for both the kommune and the amt and constitute 56 % respectively 85 % of the total. Other important sources of income for the Danish municipalities are fees (21 %), general subventions from the state (14 %) and specific grants from the state budget (8 %).

### **The ordinary citizen and ways to take part in the political process**

To take part in the local, regional and national elections is probably the most obvious way for an ordinary citizen to influence the political life. Every fourth year all citizens from 18 years of age with a Danish citizenship get the opportunity to vote for a specific political party or cast his/her vote on the municipal citizens list mentioned above. The participation in the national election of 2001 was as high as 87 %. The interest for the local and regional elections, however, has traditionally been much lower - around 70 % (except for the election in 2001 when all three elections were arranged on the same day). Despite the lower participation on the local and regional level, Denmark showed - in an official EU study from 1995 - to be the EU country where the citizens were most satisfied with the local democracy. As many as 82 % stated that they were very or relatively satisfied with the democracy in their own municipality - a figure that was 25 % higher than the EU average. With these optimistic findings in mind it is, however, important also to study other reports on the field - reports that mirror another picture of the Danish democracy. During the last decades fewer and fewer politicians have run for the elections, the political life has to some extent become more professionalized, the gap has widened between urban and rural areas regarding political interest and evident social groups have become more and more marginalized in the politics. Today, young people and people with foreign background are among those groups that are most underrepresented in the political forums on local, regional and national level.

In the Danish democracy at least three evident features appear to illustrate a system with a tradition of public involvement in the political decision-making. Firstly, over the years national referendums have become a comparatively common used way to find political solutions. Since 1915, 17 national referendums have been arranged along with referendums on the lower levels. Secondly, Denmark has got a relatively long tradition of active involvement of customers/users to different kind of welfare institutions - especially in the fields of pre-school, school and care of elderly people. For example, regarding the schools it is obligatory to set up a local committee composed of parents, teachers etc who will have great opportunities to take part in overall planning as well as the more detailed decision-making. Today, there are 1 700 committees tied to the Danish schools and 4 300 to the pre-schools - a phenomenon that could be

interpreted as a functioning supplement to the traditional forms of the representative democracy. Thirdly, a system of active NGOs and so-called citizen organisations - "borgerforeninger" - is far developed in Denmark. Many Danish individuals are members of such citizen organisations or other kinds of voluntary structures, which have the advantage to serve as supplementing elements to the institutionalised political life. The 22 borgerforeninger on Bornholm - organisations that are not interested in specific or limited issues but are willing to take a broad democratic responsibility - constitute consultative partners to the new regional council and function as an important link between ordinary citizens and the political representatives.

### **The future - problems, possibilities and views on the European Union**

Denmark has been member of the EU since 1973, that is for over 30 years. Most Danish citizens see the cooperation through EU as something relatively common and natural, but there are also opinions against the membership arguing that Denmark would be better off without the new international dependence. The island of Bornholm - a relatively peripheral region in Denmark with its unique industry, labour market and social structure - benefits from several Structural Programmes and has got great experience of EU financed projects and actions. Each year the region of Bornholm disposes approximately 3 million Euros from the EU Structural Funds, which is the highest amount per capita among all regions in Denmark.

Ms. Annelise Molin, member of the regional council and president of the ERB Executive Board, expressed some concerns regarding the future for Bornholm. Today, the unemployment rate is much higher on Bornholm than on the Danish mainland and many young people between 16 and 24 years of age leave the island to study or find employment in Copenhagen or other major cities. Therefore it must be a key issue for the future, Ms. Molin stated, to develop Bornholm to an attractive place for all social groups to live. The fragile industry structure must be strengthened, new jobs established and the young people must have something to turn back to when they have "seen the world".

# Latvia

## Baltic Sea Coastal Planning Region/ Kurzeme Region

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### Regional democracy in figures

*Kurzeme Region*

Number of inhabitants	331 530
Number of Districts	7
Number of Municipalities	101
Last/Next election, Municipal Councils	2001/2005
Number of Members, Municipal Councils	7-15
Participation, last election, Municipal Councils (average)	63 %

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### **Background of today's democracy**

After the proclamation of the independent Republic of Latvia in 1918, the process of forming local and regional governments was initiated. The process was, however, interrupted only 22 years later when the Soviet Union in 1940 invaded the country and began a 50 years era of Communism and submission to the new capital of Moscow. During the Soviet period Latvians formally elected their political representatives for the local councils, but in reality local governments - in the real sense of the meaning - did not exist. The candidates were nominated by the communistic leadership and just formally elected by people. Local communist party institutions passed all decisions and nobody could in this way risk voting against the nominated candidates. During the Second World War, Latvia lost almost one fourth of the population and more than 100 000 Latvians were deported to Siberia. At the same time an extensive number of Russian citizens moved to Latvia as a result of planned russification policy initiated by the government in Moscow, which since then has meant an obvious split of the Latvian society. Due to policy made by the Soviet government, today about one third of the inhabitants in Latvia has got Russian origin and lacks, in many cases, the right to vote and fully take part in the political life.

In the end of the 1980s the fight for an independent Latvian state was accelerated. Extensive demonstrations were arranged in all three Baltic States, criticism was expressed towards the corrupt mass media and in 1988 the national flag was used for the first time for many decades. In December 1989 local council elections were held and these were the first democratic elections in the post-war period. The elections were competitive, with more than one candidate running for each post, and a majority system was implemented. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1990, Latvia finally re-established its sovereignty and was announced as an independent republic. Some years later the concept of the reform of local governments was accepted by the national Cabinet of Ministers, which specified the main goals toward the democratisation and decentralisation of public power and administration. The Local Government Act passed in 1994 and this is still the highest governing document addressing local governments in Latvia, since no provisions are made on this issue in the Constitution. Today's new Latvian democracy is in many ways strong with public elections and a free debate. It is, as we will see, however also confronted with some difficulties and challenges for the near future.

### **Political institutions and administrative division**

Latvia is an independent republic with the president - Vaira Vike-Freiberga - elected by the national parliament for a four-year term. In a national election held every fourth year all Latvian citizens with the right to vote (see further discussion below) get the opportunity to appoint members for the unicameral parliament - "Saeima" - which in turn appoints the prime minister who is chief of the cabinet with all the ministers.

Public functions are considered to be state functions unless according to the law they are transferred either to district self-governments, local self-governments or Non-Governmental Organisations. There is one exception in this system - local and regional governments can voluntarily chose their functions if only these functions are not within the competence of some another self-government or state institution. In determining the distribution of functions among the state, the sub-national governments, the private sector and the NGOs, the principle of subsidiarity should be used. According to the constitutional interpretation, the principle states that the best solutions to problems are found on the lowest possible level, which is closest to the people. No task should be solved at a higher level than necessary. Today Latvia has two tiers of sub-national governments - one on the municipal level and one on the district level - and these are accompanied by a newly introduced division into five greater planning and statistical regions. Because of the ongoing administrative-territorial reform, the number of sub-national entities is constantly changing. For

example, it is proposed that in the 2004-2005 there will be approximately 5.5 times fewer local governments than there is today, while the current district level will be abolished.

*The Municipality.* The local level in Latvia includes 547 municipalities in total (year 2002), divided into 62 towns and seven major cities (“pilseta”), 467 rural municipalities (“pagasts”) and eleven amalgamated towns and rural municipalities (“novads”). The average Latvian municipality holds approximately 4 300 inhabitants, which is a comparatively small number in an international context. Only 4 % of all local authorities have more than 10 000 inhabitants living in its territory, while as many as 72 % have got a population number fewer than 2 000. The permanent functions of the 547 Latvian municipalities (101 in the Kurzeme Region) include among other things education, care of children and elderly people, water supply, sewerage, heating, housing support, laying of streets and roads, culture activities, social assistance, measures to decrease unemployment and maintain public order. In an equal, direct and proportional election every fourth year Latvian citizens appoint their political representatives for the local council, which is the decision-making body on the municipal level. The local council consists of the councillors - ranging between seven to 15 depending on the population of the municipality (Riga is the exception with 60 councillors) - which elect the chairman of the council - the mayor - by secret ballot. The average number of councillors serving on local councils in Latvia is smaller than that of West European countries and almost as small as in the United States. The mayor is the political head of the local authority and even if he or she according to the legislation is the most powerful person in the municipality, the Latvian mayors theoretically are relatively “weak” in an international perspective. Next to the mayor there is the executive director who is the head of the administration and the standing committees, also having a significant influence. Two standing committees - the financial committee and the social, educational and cultural affairs committee - are compulsory for every municipality, but other standing committees may also be set up in accordance with the statutes of the local government.

*The District.* The second level of the political administrative division in Latvia includes the 26 districts or “rajons” (seven entities in the Kurzeme Region) with the same seven major cities mentioned above (which are represented on both sub-national levels simultaneously). The districts hold 47 000 inhabitants on average and are not hierarchically positioned above the municipalities. The primary tasks for the Latvian districts include among other things the organisation of further education, public transport, regional development, civil defence, health care and environmental planning. The political organisation of the district is in many ways similar

to the organisation of the municipality. The district council consists of elected councillors, which appoint their chairman - the governor - who is the political leader on the district level. There are, however, also some major differences between the municipal and the district organisation. Unlike the local councillors, the members of the district council are not elected directly by the people in a popular vote but appointed *indirectly* by elected members of the municipalities. This means that since 1997 the district councils are composed of the chairmen/mayors of the local governments in the respective district.

*The Region.* Latvia's territory is also divided into five planning/statistical regions - the regions of Riga, Kurzeme, Vidzeme, Zemgale and Latgale. None of the regions is an administrative region, but just a territorial entity. The division is among other things used as a mean for being included in the EU statistical region system and for the purpose of promoting regional development. The regions are not governed by any elected politicians, political institutions etc, but represent at this moment the potential regional division of Latvia after the administrative-territorial reform has been carried through.

Since the Soviet period with only one permitted political party, a process of party fragmentation has been evident on the political scene in Latvia. In the mid-1990s, more than 50 parties were registered and took part in the elections on the local and national level. Today a 5 % electoral threshold has been set up and every political party must have at least 200 members. This has meant that some of the smallest parties have been excluded from the register. The major national parties participate in the local elections, but in general they are not very involved in local politics. Instead the local scene often includes strong local parties - for example the Ventspils Party or "Latvijai un Ventspilij" - and so-called "voters' associations". A voters' association is formed by people who sign a list of local candidates signifying their support for the list as well as for the individuals appearing on it. A list of candidates for a local council must be signed by at least 20 voters. In the 2001 local election, the lists of candidates belonging to parties or voters' associations totalled 1 572, representing the nomination of 13 122 candidates for the 4 335 local positions. The voters' association lists were more successful than those of the parties - 43 % of the association candidates and only 19 % of the party candidates were elected to become local councillors.

### **Financial conditions**

The average Latvian municipality spends about 50 % of its budget on education, 16 % on housing and 8 % on social care. The incomes are generated from shares of state taxes, shares of state fees, local duties and

fees, grants and earmarked grants allocated from the state budget etc. There are only state taxes in Latvia - no municipal taxes - which means that the local governments still have limited autonomy to form their budgets and finances. The tax base and the tax rate of the personal income tax are set by the central government without any influence from local governments. The income tax is collected by the State Revenue Service (only three cities - Riga, Ventspils and Liepaja - collect the personal income tax themselves) and is distributed through the State Treasury to the local government budgets according to the place of residence of the taxpayers. In this way, the central government has a decisive influence on the total financial framework of the local government sector.

### **The ordinary citizen and ways to take part in the political process**

Today citizens' attitudes towards the new democracy are less optimistic than they were in the beginning of the 1990s. Many Latvians express sceptical opinions regarding both the elected politicians and their own possibilities to take part in the political process in efficient ways. There are, however, several ways for people to get information, communicate and to take part in the joint development of society. The laws of the Republic of Latvia provide the right for citizens to establish and participate in social as well as political organisations, to lodge formal complaints and applications, to attend local council meetings which are open for the general public, to question administrative documents of government institutions, to demonstrate, to participate in advisory councils and work groups set up by the municipality etc. The Law on Self-Government does, however, not mention anything about the organisation of local referendums. Such referendums - practical ways to consult the ordinary citizen and sometimes anchor political decision-making - *can* be arranged but are rarely done so on the local level. Instead, different kinds of polls are sometimes used to pick up thoughts and wishes.

Participating in the local and national elections is, of course, one of the most obvious ways for citizens to influence the political process. In the last elections, on the local level as well as on the national, the public participation has been around 60 %. Due to the specific social structure in Latvia with a large group of residents without Latvian citizenship, many people - approximately one fourth of the grown-up population - is not entitled to vote neither locally nor nationally. In Riga, where most of the Russians live, only 40 % of the citizens are allowed to take part in the regular elections. According to a new law, the right to vote is granted to all citizens with a Latvian citizenship from 18 years of age, except persons (a) who are serving sentence in confinement, (b) accused of or charged with a crime if their case is considered to be a security threat, (c) who legally have been declared incompetent or incapacitated. One of the most

important obstacles for many Russians and other so-called “non-citizens” to receive Latvian citizenship is the lack of language proficiency. The law states among other things that all potential applicants must have basic knowledge of the Latvian language and know fundamental laws as well as main facts of the Latvian society.

In Latvia of today there are about 6 000 registered NGOs, often targeted towards social services and uniting people of similar interests, needs and concerns in order to achieve common goals. The typical NGO is younger than four years old, has less than 50 members, works with only a small annual budget and acts in many cases as a complement to the municipality in carrying out social services to the local citizens.

### **The future - problems, possibilities and views on the European Union**

The Kurzeme Region is confronted with both problems and positive challenges for the near future. Mr. Zigo Rutkovskis, director of the Kurzeme Region Development Agency, pointed out that the region has some social and economical advantages - in particular in comparison to the rest of Latvia - and perceived positive opportunities with the forthcoming EU membership. The cities of Ventspils and Liepaja have the biggest ports in Latvia and constitute the most significant economic centres outside the capital. Ventspils has, Mr. Rutkovskis underlined, the highest Gross Domestic Product per inhabitant in the whole country. In some areas, however, the unemployment level is constantly above 15 % due to lack of economic activity and in other areas economic difficulties are foreseen as present industries are not competitive with the ones in the EU. Development projects and action plans are, though, commonly prepared to improve the current socio-economic situation in the Kurzeme Region.

A majority of the Latvian people is positive to EU and to a forthcoming membership. This was confirmed in the national accession referendum held in September this year, when 67 % voted for a membership and 32 % against. In the regular report on Latvia's progress towards accession (2002), EU states that Latvia fulfils the political criteria and has made considerable progress in consolidating the democracy. Further efforts are, however, needed in order to develop a professional civil service, fight corruption and promote the integration of non-citizens into the Latvian society.

# Lithuania

## Klaipeda County

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Regional democracy in figures	<i>Klaipeda County</i>
Number of inhabitants	415 800
Number of Municipalities	7
Last/Next election, Municipal Councils	2002/2006
Number of Members, Municipal Councils	21-31
Participation, last election, Municipal Councils (average)	51 %
Number of Members, Regional Council	16
Governance, Regional Council	Left wing

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### **Background of today's democracy**

During the First World War, Lithuania was occupied by Germany but gained its independence in the beginning of 1918. After a relatively short period of democracy, a nationalistic coup took place and an authoritarian regime was installed. This regime was to govern Lithuania until the initial phase of the Second World War, when the country in 1941 became annexed by the Germans and in 1944 by the Soviet Union. According to public estimations, Lithuania lost more than 300 000 citizens until the beginning of the 1950s. Some were killed in battles, others were executed and an extensive number were deported to Siberia. During the Soviet period and the Communism, a great number of Russians moved to Lithuania. The number was, however, considerably smaller in comparison to the situation in Latvia. This meant that Lithuania, in some senses, could keep a greater independence towards the government in Moscow than the other two Baltic States.

In 1988 the independent Lithuanian front "Sajudis" was formed and the struggle for a free nation accelerated more and more. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 1990, Lithuania became the first of the Soviet republics to declare its independence, but this proclamation was not generally recognised until September the year after. In March 1990, the first local elections were held and the chairman of Sajudis - Vytautas Landsbergis - was, at the same

time, appointed president of the new republic. During the first years of the 1990s a modified political-administrative structure of the local self-government was established. This model was, however, criticised from its very introduction and therefore replaced by a whole new system, implemented in 1995. The structure is currently functioning (see further presentation below) and entitles all Lithuanian citizens from 18 years of age to participate in the free, equal and universal elections arranged on the local and national level.

### **Political institutions and administrative division**

Lithuania is an independent republic with the president - Rolandas Paksas - elected by popular vote for a five-year term. In a national election, the Lithuanian citizens also get the opportunity to appoint members for the unicameral national parliament - "Seimas" - which are elected for four years. Half of the members are elected directly and half by a proportional representation. The prime minister is the head of the cabinet and is appointed by the president on the approval of the parliament.

As mentioned above, a new political-administrative reform was introduced in 1995. This reform replaced a system of 581 administrative units with a new model consisting of a considerable less number of units working on two sub-national levels. On the local level, urban and rural municipalities are functioning while indirect counties, supervised and financed by the national government, are working on the regional level. Since 1995, only small adjustments have occurred regarding territorial divisions and the number of sub-national units in Lithuania. In the near future, however, the number of counties could possibly be reduced while the municipalities could increase in both number and economical strength.

*The Municipality.* The local level in Lithuania includes 60 municipalities in total (7 in Klaipeda County), divided into urban and rural entities. The average municipality holds approximately 61 700 inhabitants, which makes the Lithuanian municipality to a large unit not only in comparison to the other Baltic States but also in a widened European context. The fields of competence for the municipalities include among other things civil protection, health services, culture, social security, care of elderly, pre-school and education, heating, housing, water supply, roads and public transports. Today, all Lithuanian citizens elect their local representatives to serve a four-year term on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. In the beginning of the 1990s, the term of office for a local councillor was two years, and after 1996 the municipal elections were held every third year. Since 2002 the elections are, as mentioned above, arranged every fourth year which corresponds to the election term for the national parliament. The local council is the main deliberative body of

the municipality and has several coordinating and decision-making responsibilities. The council works in accordance with an activity plan that is submitted by the mayor, who is appointed chairman in an indirect election by the councillors. The number of councillors differs from one municipality to another and ranges between 21 and 51 depending on the size of the actual municipality. A person with a Lithuanian citizenship must be at least 21 years of age to become a member of a local council or elected mayor. The mayor is both the legislative and the executive head of the local government and is assisted by the deputy mayor. The mayor is, among other things, responsible for exercising powers delegated by the state, coordinating activities of council committees and supervising the implementation of council decisions. Since the municipal executive boards have been abolished, the role of the Lithuanian mayor has become even stronger during the past years. In order to make decision-making more professional and effective, all municipalities establish a number of committees, which are subordinated the mayor and the council. There is no uniform structure of municipal committees. Each municipality is free to decide how many committees that will be established, but as a rule there are often three to eight committees. The committees conduct a preliminary analysis of issues, prepare and submit proposals to the council or the mayor and supervise how laws and decisions are observed. In addition, an administrator is appointed by the mayor, who acts as the head of the local government administration.

According to the Law on Local Self-government, the local council is entitled to decide on the division and boundaries of the territory into specific *neighbourhoods* or *local communities*. The neighbourhoods are subordinated the municipalities and function as flexible and dynamic units which, among other things, are providing municipal services, collecting opinions and requests from local residents and acting as local advisors to the municipal councils. Within Klaipeda County, there are a great number of local communities - approximately 1 500 to 2 500 inhabitants in each neighbourhood - which are governed by appointed civil servants; the community managers. Even though the neighbourhoods often experience insufficient administrative capacity, the actual arrangement provides an interesting example of how democracy and the principle of subsidiarity can be strengthened on the lowest level.

*The County.* On the level between the state and the municipalities, we find the 10 Lithuanian counties, each holding hundred thousands of citizens. The Lithuanian county has indirect powers and is, according to the Law on the Governing of the County, a higher territorial administrative unit of the Republic of Lithuania, in which governing is organised by the national government by the appointed county governor and other

government institutions. The law also states that the government of the county is a constituent part of the state administration and that funds that are necessary for the governing of the county shall be appropriated from the state budget. The Lithuanian county is, in this way, subordinated the national level, governed by a county governor who is politically appointed and dismissed by the national government on proposal by the prime minister. No public or direct elections are conducted at this regional level. The counties have taken some central government responsibilities - often within the frames of the regional perspective - including hospitals and social care, culture, education, spatial planning, regional development etc.

In Klaipeda County, the governor is the legislative head of the county and assisted by the vice governor. The governor is the responsible part for the contacts with Vilnius and for the decisions that are made, and is supported by the advisory regional development council. Today, this council is not publicly elected but consists of the county governor together with mayors and councillors from the municipalities.

In March 2002, 42 political parties and organisations were registered in Lithuania. Today, some national parties are evident on both the national and the local arena but there are also local parties working with issues and interests connected to a specific municipality and its surroundings. A political candidate must represent a certain political party or organisation, but in the elections to the national parliament one can also run as an "independent candidate" supported by a number of citizens proclaiming their support on specific signature lists.

### **Financial conditions**

The Constitution gives local governments the right to draft and approve their own budgets and, to a certain degree, establish local dues and levy taxes and duties. The dependence of finances from the state - through tax revenues and general/earmarked grants etc - is, however, still extensive and the municipalities may not introduce own taxes. As recognised by the municipalities themselves as well as international experts, economic efficiency and political accountability at the local level in Lithuania could be enhanced greatly by allowing local governments' discretionary revenue authority. At the moment municipalities have the right to exempt enterprises from local land rent and local land and real estate taxes, but they do not have the right to increase any tax. Traditionally, the most important component of local expenditures has been the social sector, which includes education, culture, social security and welfare. In 1998, social sector expenditures represented approximately 70 % of the total municipal expenditures - education accounted for three fourths of the total.

### **The ordinary citizen and ways to take part in the political process**

The feelings and opinions about the new democratic system are relatively mixed in the Lithuanian society of today. Some people, mostly young and educated citizens, see great opportunities with the new situation and are attracted by the international influences and the possibilities to work or study abroad. Others, mostly elderly citizens and people living in the poorer rural areas, have less understanding for the new market-economy and are still convinced that the state is the best organiser of people's welfare. Generally, the attitudes were much more optimistic in the beginning of the 1990s than they are today. Many ordinary Lithuanian citizens lack information and knowledge about the way the new democratic system is organised and tend to think that it is rather difficult to efficiently take part in the political process. The Law on Self-Government states, however, that the local authorities shall provide conditions for the population to directly participate in drafting decisions, organising polls, meetings, assemblies, public consideration of petitions, as well as promote other forms of civic initiatives. The law also states that citizens shall be entitled to get access to decisions and other kind of information, and to receive public and justified answers to expressed opinion on work done by the municipalities.

The public participation in the two recent elections on the national level was 52 % and 59 %, but the voting rate has traditionally been a bit lower in the local elections. Some obvious social groups are, just like in many other democratic states, underrepresented in the forums where the political decisions are made - for example young people, elderly and women. Among the regular members of the national parliament in 2000, only 1,4 % were 30 years old or younger when, at the same time, as many as 70 % belonged to the category between 41 and 60 years of age. Among the 1 562 members of the local councils in 2002, also worth mentioning, 82 % were men and only 18 % women. Moreover, council meetings are open to the general public in Lithuania and when issues of specific interest are discussed Non-Governmental Organisations and other kind of voluntary associations sometimes come to listen. There are about 400 different NGOs in Klaipeda City - some of great size with extensive capacity, others which are very small with only a limited budget - and about half of these are able to tender for municipal contracts, enabling them to provide certain welfare services as for example care of children, elderly or disabled people. The Constitution and laws do not provide for the arrangement of local or regional referendums. Local authorities may organise polls on decisions made by the local government, but the result of such polls are only advisory in nature. Although the significance of these polls should not be exaggerated, they are important for maintaining a close relation between the local authorities and the citizens.

### **The future - problems, possibilities and views on the European Union**

The future for Klaipeda County will hold both problems and new possibilities, and the forthcoming EU membership - which 91 % voted for in the referendum on the 10-11<sup>th</sup> of May this year - will, of course, mean the most important challenge. Ms. Vilija Venckuté, member of the Klaipeda City Council, viewed the greater access to the EU market as something very important for the county and hoped that this would imply economical growth as well as improved welfare for the citizens. Ms. Venckuté also expressed some worries, for example the low birth rate in the county and the constant flow of young persons leaving the area for more attractive cities. She also mentioned that there are relatively great differences within the county regarding unemployment, social welfare and level of education, and hoped for a more even regional development in the near future. Regarding Lithuania's advances towards EU, the EU accession report of 2002 concludes that the political institutions function properly and in conditions of stability. The report also states that Lithuania demonstrates the characteristics of a democracy and thereby fulfils the political criteria. Measures to improve the administrative capacity and to fight corruption have turned out in a positive way, but further efforts are still needed. Lithuania respects human rights and freedoms, and the active role of the ombudsman in the field of equal opportunities and children's rights is noteworthy.

# Poland

## Pomeranian Region and Warmia-Masurian Region

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<b>Regional democracy in figures</b>	<i>Pomeranian Region</i>
Number of inhabitants	2 179 100
Number of Powiats (district)	20
Number of Gminas (municipalities)	123
Last/Next election, Regional Parliament	2002/2006
Number of Members, Regional Parliament	33
Number of Members, Regional Board	5
Participation, last election, Reg. Parl.	44 %
Governance, Regional Parliament	Right wing

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<b>Regional democracy in figures</b>	<i>Warmia-Masurian Region</i>
Number of inhabitants	1 460 400
Number of Powiats (district)	21
Number of Gminas (municipalities)	116
Last/Next election, Regional Parliament	2002/2006
Number of Members, Regional Parliament	30
Number of Members, Regional Board	5
Participation, last election, Reg. Parl.	46 %
Governance, Regional Parliament	Left wing

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### **Background of today's democracy**

The first Polish Constitution, produced in 1791, was the first written Constitution in Europe. It was enacted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, which was later to become the national holiday of Poland. Two years later, Poland was invaded by both the Russian and the Prussian army and in 1795 the Polish state disappeared from the map of Europe and was not to reappear until after World War 1. The reestablishment meant independent political elections to the national parliament - the first in January 1919 - and democratic practices lasted until the May coup in 1926 led by General

Pilsudski. The Pilsudski regime became one of many authoritarian regimes that existed in Europe in this period, but even though the democratic institutions indeed lost their importance, both the parliament and the political parties continued to exist.

During the Cold War Poland was a Soviet satellite country, but one that was comparatively tolerant and progressive. Labour turmoil in 1980 led to the formation of the independent trade union “Solidarity” that over time became a strong political force. In 1989 the first partially free election in Poland’s post-war history concluded the Solidarity movement’s ten-year struggle for freedom and resulted in the defeat of Poland’s communist rulers. The result led to a chain-reaction in the whole Eastern and Central Europe, which meant the collapse of the communist system that for several decades had undermined national independence as well as local self-government in Poland.

After the independence and the national election in 1989, the first free elections on the local level were held in May 1990. From this year the process of introducing three levels of sub-national self-government (see below) started in order to reduce the involvement of the central government on the lower levels. At the same time Poland entered a period of transition - a “New Era” - which meant more than just political changes. There was a great challenge to transform the country into market economy and to form a modern and effective state that would meet the fundamental needs of its citizens. People had great hopes and expectations on the new democracy - maybe unreasonably great, some might say - and a “shock therapy” program enabled the country to transform its economy into one of the most robust in Eastern-Central Europe. Despite of this many Poles have had problems to adapt to today’s labour market, which has lead to huge unemployment and, in turn, increased disappointment regarding the new democratic system.

The current Polish Constitution was adopted after a referendum in 1997. The Constitution guarantees the local self-government and the strong position for the municipalities, while the two other sub-national levels - formed and introduced in 1999 - are regulated in common law.

### **Political institutions and administrative division**

Poland is a republic with the president - Aleksander Kwasniewski - elected by popular vote for a five-year term. In a national election Polish citizen from 18 years of age also get the opportunity to appoint members for the bicameral National Assembly consisting of the parliament - “the Sejm” - and the senate. The prime minister is head of the cabinet and of the ministers, who are appointed by the president and approved by the parliament.

In Poland there are, as already stated, three sub-national levels with different kind of competences and geographical size. *The gmina* is the Polish municipality, *the voivodship* constitutes the region/province and between these two levels we find *the powiat* or the Polish district. This administrative structure became the result of the significant reform of local and regional self-government in Poland introduced on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1999.

*The Municipality.* The smallest unit geographically is the *gmina* - the Polish municipality - which holds about 10-15 000 inhabitants on average. The 2 489 *gminas* (123 in the Pomeranian Region and 116 in the Warmia-Masurian Region) form the basic level of public administration and it is here the most essential collective needs are met. In particular, the *gminas* are responsible for primary health care, education (kindergarten, elementary schools), social welfare, municipal housing, public order and protection, local roads and public transport, water and sewage systems, land management, electricity and heat supply etc. The *gminas* also perform tasks delegated to them by the central government and state administration and which remain under state supervision. To carry out these delegated tasks the municipalities are by law guaranteed financial support. Every fourth year the citizens have got the opportunity to participate in the two elections that are held on this local level. One election concerns the *gmina* council, which is the legislative body with members - in most cases but not always - representing different political parties. The council plays the basic role in the *gmina* and establishes permanent or ad hoc committees in order to make the work with specific tasks and issues more effective. By secret vote the council elects the *gmina* board, which is the executive body with three to seven members depending on the size of the municipality. Since 2002 the head of the board (called *wojt*, mayor or president) is elected through a popular vote, which means that *both* the council *and* the head of board have got the support of the citizens. This can, in worst cases, lead to conflicts, but - according to Mr. Grzegorz MocarSKI, director, the parliament in the Pomeranian Region - more often to effective governance since the two bodies have divided competences. Another advantage with the newly introduced system is that it forms a democracy that combines elements of individual political beliefs with traditional ideology channelled through the political parties.

*The District.* The second level - between the local and the regional level - is the *powiat*, which holds about 80-90 000 inhabitants on average. There are 373 *powiat*s in Poland (20 in the Pomeranian Region and 21 in the Warmia-Masurian Region) and in most cases the geographical area of two or more *gminas* form the *powiat*. The *powiat* self-government is responsible for local issues which, due to the subsidiarity and proportionality principles, can not be ascribed to the *gminas*. The *powiat*s are

large enough to maintain efficiently many of the everyday institutions of public life, such as secondary schools, general hospitals as well as powiat police, tax offices and cultural institutions etc. At the same time they are small enough to place the administration and control over these institutions in the hands of the citizens by utilising public involvement, taking advantage of NGOs and other forms of civic engagement.

*The Region.* On the regional, or provincial, level in Poland we find the voivodship. The 16 voivodships - created after the significant reform of 1999 - are quite large units, with populations ranging between 1 and 5 million and an average population of approximately 2,4 million. The voivodships have independent legal identities and their own budgets, and they are mainly responsible for the regional development policy programmes whose primary purpose is to ensure that the region's human and material capital is put to best use. This means that the self-governing voivodships perform mainly developmental functions - promote growth rather than render services, and play an economic rather than an administrative role. The range of public services performed by the actual unit is thus limited to those which are clearly of a regional character and can not be executed by either gminas or powiats. Major areas for the voivodship - provided by the law - in the area of public service include spatial development, (higher) education, health protection, culture, infrastructure, environment, modernisation of rural areas etc. In a public vote every fourth year, the citizens elect their political representatives for the regional parliament - the legislative body - which, in turn, appoint the executive regional board headed by "the marshal".

Alongside the territorial self-government in gminas, powiats and voivodships, the central government is represented in the voivodship by the "voivod" (the governor). The state appointed voivod is responsible for ensuring that national laws and policies are executed and enforced within the region, and that state institutions operating in the region perform their functions appropriately. Much of the work focuses on supervision and if a decision made by the local or regional governments should be inconsistent with the Polish law, the voivod could annul the decision.

The Polish political scene is undergoing constant change on all levels. There are a dozen political parties of which only a few play an important role in the political process. There are major local and regional differences, but generally speaking one could say that the lower level of local authority, the greater diversification of parties and groups sharing the political power.

## **Financial conditions**

The delegation of powers down to lower levels of self-government is accompanied by the decentralisation of public finances to the same level. Recent laws contribute to the introduction of a clear and transparent assignment of financial responsibilities to particular entities and determine the nature of the revenues for the self-governing bodies. For the Polish gminas, powiats and voivodships the incomes include three basic sources: (1) Own revenues; understood as property taxes, income taxes and other statutory incomes (fees and taxes). (2) General subventions from the state budget; could be calculated for a specific purpose such as education or infrastructure, but may also be spent freely or carried over as surplus from one year to another. (3) Earmarked grants from the state budget; given for a specific purpose and granted for a given fiscal year. Apart from these public sources of incomes, local entities are empowered to obtain revenues from private law sources and assets they own (for example ground, housing and commercial properties).

In 2000, the own revenues of all Polish gminas constituted 52,5 % of the total income, the general subventions 33,7 % and the earmarked grants 13,7 %. This means that the municipalities shape their budgets to a considerable degree from their own income, which in this respect contributes to the growth of autonomy gaining the local self-government.

## **The ordinary citizen and ways to take part in the political process**

Today citizens' opinions and attitudes towards the new political system are less optimistic than they were in the beginning of the 1990s. To be a "politician" is not always regarded in a positive way by the common citizens, but as someone who has learnt to use the democracy to gain his or her own interests. In a nationwide poll from March 1999, 31 % of the citizens considered the Polish political system to be good or basically good, while 61 % regarded it to be bad requiring numerous changes. This has, as one of several causes, led to a relatively low public participation - around 45-50 % - in the local, regional and national elections in Poland and to negative beliefs on how an ordinary citizen possibly could influence the political process in effective ways. Regardless if the groups with political power are reluctant to give up political competence or if the general public are just not interested in taking part in the political life, certain social clusters are in fact underrepresented in most of the political forums - for example youths, elderly people, groups with low education and women.

Effective or not - there are of course several ways for citizens to freely express their opinions and to put forward their wills and requests. In both the Pomeranian and the Warmia-Masurian Region most political meetings

are open for interested listeners and every now and then public demonstrations are organised by political parties or NGOs. Other ways for people to express their minds *between* the local/regional elections every fourth year include writing petitions to local authorities, actions of collecting signatures to support or reject a given matter, using the mass media and participating in local referendums, which significantly more often are initiated by the citizens than the local authorities. Probably the most effective way to influence the political life is, however, to work through one or several of the over 20 000 registered NGOs in Poland. These voluntary organisations, often established spontaneously on grass-roots level, operate in various fields and are perceived by local authorities as important partners to carry out social welfare services. For example, the NGOs could tender for contracts, financed partly by the gmina/powiat and partly by own funds, enabling them to provide education, health care or to organise activities for children or disabled persons.

### **The future - problems, possibilities and views on the European Union**

In the beginning of June this year, the national accession referendum was held in Poland. After all the ballots had been counted, the National Electoral Commission officially reported that 77 % of the voters were positive to an EU membership, while 23 % had voted against. The Commission also reported that about six persons out of ten had chosen to participate in the election. The positive attitudes towards EU have also been confirmed by higher politicians and civil servants in the Pomeranian and Warmia-Masurian Regions. Many have pointed out that a Polish membership will gain the regions both economically and democratically. A future membership will make it easier for foreign companies to invest in Poland, which - along with the Structural Funds - will benefit both rural and urban areas and lay ground for extended regional development. At the same time the cooperation through EU will imply many "good practises" of how democracy can be structured and realised, and as Mr. Brunon Synak, president of the regional parliament in the Pomeranian Region, expressed it: We would not be interested in the EU if a membership, at the same time, did not mean *more* of democracy!

According to EU's regular report on Poland's progress towards accession from 2002, Poland fulfil the political criteria and has made a considerable progress in further consolidating and deepening the stability of its institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for minorities. The EU report states, however, that the administrative capacity across the civil service still has to be improved and expresses a serious concern regarding the corruption on both political and civic levels of society. Other issues for the Pomeranian and the Warmia-Masurian

Regions to deal with in the future are the unemployment rate - 20 % and 28 % for the two regions - and the increased migration flows that possibly could follow on a Polish EU membership.



# Russia

## Kaliningrad Region

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### Regional democracy in figures

*Kaliningrad Region*

Number of inhabitants	946 700
Number of Municipalities	22
Last/Next election, Regional Governor	2000/2005
Last/Next election, Regional Parliament	2000/2005
Number of Members, Regional Parliament	32
Participation, last election, Regional Governor	47 %
Participation, last election, Regional Parliament	49 %
Governance, Regional Parliament	Mixture of political parties with majority of liberal forces

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### Background of today's democracy

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the basis of the Russian civil society was developed in the frameworks of the zemstvo system. At the same time, many of the intellectuals, military, workers and other city dwellers were influenced by radical political thoughts. By 1917, widespread strikes, rioting and army mutinies broke out forcing the Tsar to abdicate, and in October the same year the Bolshevik coup took place. The Bolsheviks were the more radical factions after the split in the Social Democratic Party and under the leadership of Lenin the Bolsheviks moved quickly to consolidate their position, bringing land, industry and finance under state control. When Lenin died in 1924, Josef Stalin who instituted a programme of industrialisation and enforced collectivisation in the agricultural sector followed him. Stalin also introduced a new national policy which, among other things, included the re-annexation of the three Baltic States and a process of russification in the area.

After the Second World War, the 40 following years included social and political reforms, planned economy, armament race within the frames of the Cold War and a harsh and hierarchical communistic policy to keep together the Soviet Union. The local self-government was - more or less - non-existing and citizens were only entitled to vote in elections where

all the representatives were nominated by and belonging to the only legal party - the Communist Party. In the beginning of the 1980s, failed attempts to restructure the industry led to a severe economic crisis which was accompanied by new liberal ideas. Mikhail Gorbachev introduced glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) and in an experimental move in the 1987 elections on the local level, some entities - pilot units - were allowed to field more candidates than were vacant offices. The national stagnation and the new liberal ideas were all contributing to the break-up of the Soviet Union in December 1991. In the early years of independence, the legal framework for local self-government in Russia evolved primarily through amending the Law on Local Self-government in the Russian Federation (1991), the new Constitution (1993) and the Law on General Principles of Local Self-government (1995). The Constitution, which was adopted in a national referendum, states that "local self-government bodies do not form part of the system of state power" (Article 12) and that local community possess autonomy in addressing issues of local importance (Article 8).

Today, equal and free political elections are held on the local, regional and national level in Russia, a range of parties and independent candidates are competing for political power and democratic institutions have been established to serve all citizens. The democracy is, however, still very young and the conditions can hardly be regarded as stable in today's Russia. In practice, Russia's local self-governments have not been able to exercise the full authority that they have been given on paper, and one reason for this is that the leaders of the state government still are reluctant to yield political as well as financial power to the local authorities. Poor economical conditions, widespread corruption and criminality, political crises, high rates of unemployment, public apathy for political matters and barely no tradition of local governance are making the conditions worse. There is, in this sense, no doubt that Russia still has a long way to go in order to consolidate her new democracy.

### **Political institutions and administrative division**

Russia is an independent federation with the president - Vladimir Putin - elected by a popular vote to serve a four-year term. The cabinet is composed of the premier and his deputies, ministers and other agency heads, and all are appointed by the president who has been awarded extensive political power, also in comparison with other presidential democracies. The parliament consists of two chambers - the Federation Council and the State Duma - and the latter is the representative assembly with political candidates elected every fourth year by Russian citizens from 18 years of age. The federal level and the regions constitute the state, while the municipalities are the basic units of the local self-government.

Describing the political-administrative sub-national division in a general way is at the moment associated with a lot of difficulties. Local and regional responsibilities are constantly changing, laws and information are lacking or can be interpreted in different ways, conditions are different for municipalities from one region to another and the Constitution is somewhat vague in describing the frames of the local government. Furthermore, a new Local Government Act will be adopted and implemented in the forthcoming years. The act will fundamentally change the conditions for the municipalities in Russia and, among other things, closer stipulate the relationship between the federal, regional and local level. Duties and responsibilities will be transferred and changed, and the number of municipalities will probably increase heavily. In addition, the municipalities will most likely be divided into a two-tier system, in contrast to the one single layer present today.

As stated above, the Constitution and the federal laws stipulate only general frames for the local self-government. The organisation of local political institutions and the formulation of duties and responsibilities are delegated to regional law making and the municipal statutes, in this way enabling obvious differences among the 89 Russian regions. The following presentation will, therefore, be more focused on the conditions in the Kaliningrad Region.

*The Municipality.* The local level in Russia includes over 12 200 municipalities (22 in Kaliningrad Region), divided into cities, urban-type settlements, city districts, rayons, rural districts and rural settlements. All local governments enjoy the same institutional and administrative rights, without subordination of one municipality to another. Typical responsibilities for the Russian municipalities include education, care of children, heating, housing, sewerage, water supply, municipal health care, public transport and communication, culture, planning and development, promotion of employment etc. As shown, the municipalities are charged with the responsibilities to carry out a fairly wide range of public services, but in recent years the problem has been that duties have not been accompanied by sufficient financial support from the federal level, thus leaving the municipalities in a very difficult situation (see below, regarding incomes for the Russian municipalities). The Law on Local Self-government delegates to regions the right to establish the legal framework for local institutions, including their powers, procedures for establishment, organisation of activities etc. Although the structure of local governments may vary from region to region, in practice the distribution of power tend to be similar. Most municipalities follow the “strong mayor/weak council” model, which can take many forms. In Kaliningrad Region, the municipal mayors are elected by the citizens in equal and free elections

every fifth year. He or she is directly accountable to the people and is the head of the local administration, constituting the executive power of the municipality. The internal structure of the local administration is to large extent left to the independent municipality to decide, but typical administrative departments are the budget or financial department, the legal department, the department for municipal property management and departments responsible for particular functions, such as education, public transport etc. Every fifth year, the Kaliningrad citizens from 18 years of age also have the opportunity to participate in the elections to the local councils, consisting of 6 (in Mamonovo) to 23 (in Tchernyachovsk) political representatives. The council is the representative body of the municipality and is entitled to adopt local laws, approve the local budget and adopt plans and programmes of local development etc.

*The Region.* The Russian Federation consists of 89 member-regions or "subjects", including 55 oblasts (Kaliningrad Region is one), 21 republics, ten autonomous districts, two federal cities and one autonomous oblast. Despite the diversity of categories, all subjects of the Federation have equal status pursuant to the Constitution from 1993. The regional level is, among other things, responsible for regional health care and social institutions, planning and regional development, international cooperation, transport, infrastructure and communication. Just as on the local level, both the executive head and the representative council are publicly elected in two separate universal elections. The executive head - the governor - is elected for five years and he or she is the chief of the regional administration. If the governor is re-elected the administration stays put, if the governor is *not* re-elected the administration often retires too. The representative council, or the regional дума, is the legislative authority and consists of members elected for a five-year term. The дума adjusts national directives and guidelines to regional settings and passes regional laws that are carried out.

The fact that the citizens elect both the executive and the representative powers on the local, regional and national level, has contributed to frequent conflicts between the political bodies. By a decree in 1993, president Yeltsin strengthened the executive bodies at the expense of the legislative branch and still today this distinction of power is very obvious in Russia. The development of local self-government has also been marked by frequent and grave conflicts between the municipalities and the regions, and between the regions and the federal level. The conflicts have not seldom dealt with taxation or different kind of financial issues.

Compared to the Western democracies, Russia has a large number of political parties. In 1998, some 150 parties, blocs and movements were registered with the Justice Ministry and one year later 36 political organisations actually participated in the election to the national parliament. This means that the Russian party system has become quite fragmented. While some parties have been relatively stable and identify themselves with an ideological position, most organisations are small with only a few members, lacking a broad geographical base as well as a coherent platform, and are developed around well-known personalities. Rather than the parties changing persons, it is the persons who change party. Political parties are evident on all three levels of the Russian society, but generally they are much less developed on the local and regional level than on the national. Instead, in the elections on the two sub-national levels, a majority of candidates independent of political parties are usually running for office.

### **Financial conditions**

The largest areas of expenditure in local budgets are housing and utilities, education and health care. Since hospitals are for the most part located in large cities, rural municipalities spend less on health care and more - accounting for more than half of all budget resources - in the field of education. The main incomes for the municipalities include local taxes and fees, non-tax revenues and grants from higher-level budgets, such as subventions, subsidies, equalisation transfers and mutual settlements. Regarding the local taxes and fees - amounted to 13 % (in 1999) of all revenues for the municipalities - the local governments are entitled to levy tax for enterprises, land and individual property, but *not* personal income tax which is collected by the federal level. This means that the local governments are heavily dependent on the governments of higher levels for the transfer of financial support. As local tax and non-tax revenues can cover only a small proportion of all local spending needs, the resulting financing gap must be covered by the regional governments through grants and shared revenues from federal and regional taxes. The fact that there are almost no self-sufficient municipalities in Russia is the result of insufficient local and assigned revenues, as well as the fact that regional governments derive advantages in exercising firm financial control over the localities. The development of the local self-government since the beginning of the 1990s has, in this way, not been accompanied by the transfer of genuine fiscal autonomy. The municipalities form their own budgets, but their autonomy over local revenues is still very limited. The strength or weakness of the local policy-makers is, thus, to large extent determined by their relations to the regional decision-makers and their ability to negotiate over financial issues.

### **The ordinary citizen and ways to take part in the political process**

The financial dependence of local governments on higher authorities has greatly contributed to a widespread public indifference to local politics. Compared with the daily concerns of economic survival, participation in democratic processes may seem unimportant to many citizens. The lack of interest is also rooted in habits established during the era of Communism, with its absence of public participation in political life and lack of interest groups formed by citizen initiative rather than directives from above. There are (as discussed above) political parties evident on the national, regional and local level, and in the regular elections these are - especially on the two latter levels - complemented by so-called "independent candidates". These independents are not belonging to specific political parties, but often run for office on the basis of personal characteristics, such as occupation or past experience in government administration. Among candidates running for a seat in the representative branch of government, there are many teachers, medical doctors and directors of enterprises. Since as many as 78 % of the Russian citizens do not identify themselves with any political party (in a national study from 1994), the independent candidates have come to play a crucial role in the political life. To be entitled to run for a political post, the candidate must collect a certain number of supporting citizen signatures and/or pay a specific amount of money.

Like in many other democracies, some obvious social groups are underrepresented in the political life. Women, young and elderly people are to less extent present in the forums where political decisions are made. Typically for women and youngsters, other forms of democratic engagements are more popular than the political parties - for example, activities through different kind of Non-Governmental Organisations, such as unions of veterans, associations for single mothers or widows, organisations for youth or disabled people, or groups working with environmental issues. In many aspects, NGOs in the Kaliningrad Region are more developed than the average Russian NGO, as active leaders have gained qualification and experiences from cooperation with similar organisations in Poland, Lithuania, the EU states etc. The NGOs are present on the federal and the regional level but just to a minor extent on the municipal level. The low or falling voting rate in the regular political elections is another feature that unites Russia with other democratic states of today. In the recent local and regional elections in Kaliningrad, the level of participation has been around 50 %.

Public demonstrations are taking part every now and then in Russia, and these are allowed after permission has been given. Referendums are stipulated in article 4 and 22 of the Law on Local Self-government, which states that “a decision made by local referendum does not require approval by bodies of state power, state officials or local self-government bodies”. In addition, article 25 grants citizens the right to legislative initiative on issues of local importance, and states that “bills on issues of local importance submitted by the citizenry to local government bodies are subject to mandatory consideration at open sessions attended by representatives of the public, and the results of such consideration shall be made public”.

Political meetings in the local councils are open for the general public to visit. While citizens are quite reluctant to do so, journalists are more willing to attend sessions in order to follow certain political issues. The mass media has developed immensely since the Communist period, but is still associated with certain problems, such as corruption and lack of objectivity.

### **The future – problems, possibilities and views on the European Union**

A Russian EU-membership is not on the agenda. In spite of this, Russia is already today involved in the EU market through its vivid cooperation with many of the EU states. Furthermore, Russia will be even more affected in the near future when Poland, the three Baltic States and other Central and Eastern European countries join the EU. The accessions will especially mean new conditions for the Kaliningrad Region, since the area will become an “island” surrounded by the new EU members Poland and Lithuania. The fact that the Kaliningrad Region will be somehow “isolated” has rendered a lively discussion - both in Russia and within the EU - especially regarding visa procedures and how citizens in the region smoothly will be able to travel to relatives in the rest of Russia. In this way, the Kaliningrad Region could be regarded as a unique area - a “pilot area” - in Russia and as a subject with great possibilities to combine the new democratic visions with West European influences. Already today, actors and institutions in the Kaliningrad Region have shown interest in a range of international co-operations, sometimes using the Tacis funds in order to fully take part in EU projects.

Along with all the challenges and positive opportunities for the Kaliningrad Region in the near future, many problems and threats are visible too. In a meeting with 14 chairmen of local councils in the region (October 2002), a list of experienced municipal problems was conducted. Some of the difficulties reflected the municipal dependence to the regional level, the lack of sufficient financial resources, the problematic relation between

the executive and the representative bodies within the municipalities, the spread of public distrust of political representatives and the actual limitations for the local self-government. Moreover, a majority of the municipal representatives also expressed a great deal of concern regarding the new Local Government Act and what consequences it will mean for the local level.

# Sweden

## The Counties of Blekinge, Kalmar and Kronoberg

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<b>Regional democracy in figures</b>	<i>Blekinge</i>
Number of inhabitants	150 400
Number of Municipalities	5
Last/Next election, County Council	2002/2006
Number of Members, County Council	47
Number of Members, County Board	15
Number of Members, Regional Council	57
Number of Members, Regional Board	17
Participation, last election, County Council	81 %
Governance, County Council	Soc. Dem.

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<b>Regional democracy in figures</b>	<i>Kalmar</i>
Number of inhabitants	235 400
Number of Municipalities	12
Last/Next election, County Council	2002/2006
Number of Members, County Council	63
Number of Members, County Board	15
Number of Members, Regional Board	33
Participation, last election, County Council	79 %
Governance, County Council	Right wing

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<b>Regional democracy in figures</b>	<i>Kronoberg</i>
Number of inhabitants	176 640
Number of Municipalities	8
Last/Next election, County Council	2002/2006
Number of Members, County Council	45
Number of Members, County Board	15
Participation, last election, County Council	79 %
Governance, County Council	Coalition, Soc.Dem./ Centre Party

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## **Background of today's democracy**

Local self-government has a long tradition in Sweden. The first legislation in the field is generally considered to be the Local Government Ordinance of 1862, which strengthened the municipal power and established a new unit of self-government - the "county council" - on the regional level. The Ordinance guaranteed the financing of local government activities as the municipalities and the county councils were granted the right to levy their own taxes and set their own tax rates when adopting their annual budgets. When the Ordinance was adopted only six percent of the Swedish population were entitled to vote in the local elections. Their voting power was based on a graded scale depending on individual income. Not until the voting rights reforms of 1918 and 1921, the universal and equal suffrage was granting all citizens from 18 years of age to fully take part in the political life. Local self-government thus existed in Sweden even before local democracy had completed its breakthrough.

The Swedish Constitution consists of four separate documents. The most important document - The Instrument of Government - is based on the principles of popular sovereignty, representative democracy and parliamentarism, and went into effect in 1975 when it replaced the outdated document from 1809. Already in the first paragraph, the local self-government - including *both* municipalities and county councils - is guaranteed a strong and independent status in relation to the state level; both politically as well as financially. In the decades before the introduction of the revised Constitution, two major municipal boundaries reforms took place in Sweden. Until 1952, about 2 500 municipalities had been functioning on the local level but this number fell dramatically to 1 037 after the first merger reform (1952-1962) and to 278 after the second (1962-1974). One of the main reasons for these two reforms was a major shift of population during these years from rural to urban areas, which undermined the economic viability of small municipalities. Today there are 290 municipalities in Sweden. The earlier merger processes have had a favourable impact on finances and administration, while one of the negative effects was the reduction in numbers of political representatives. The number of politicians fell from an estimated 200 000 in 1951 to about 70 000 in 1980.

In the initial years of the 1990s, Sweden experienced a severe economical crisis, which also affected the democratic conditions in negative ways. The unemployment rate raised, national government shifted twice and the general public expressed extensive distrust towards politicians and their ability to serve the democratic system. Sweden of today has somehow recovered from the harsh years one decade ago. A new Local

Government Act has been adopted and in 1995 Sweden became a member of the EU. The democracy is still stable, but new settings, conditions and dependencies are all the time challenging the “Swedish Model”.

### **Political institutions and administrative division**

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with the king - Carl XVI Gustaf - as the chief of the state and the prime minister as the head of government. The monarchy is hereditary, while the prime minister forms the government after the national election every fourth year. In this election, always held on the third Sunday of September *together* with the elections on local and county level, all Swedish citizens from 18 years of age get to select among a range of political parties. After the election of 2002, 349 members took place in the unicameral parliament - “Riksdagen” - all representing one of the seven parties that managed the threshold limit set to 4 %.

*The Municipality.* The municipality or the Swedish “kommun” is the lowest entity of the local self-government and holds approximately 30 800 inhabitants (ranging from 2 600 to 758 000 inhabitants) on average. The primary tasks for the 290 municipalities include both mandatory and voluntary responsibilities. Examples of the mandatory tasks are schools and education, social services, care of children and elderly people, certain environmental tasks, planning and building. Examples of voluntary responsibilities at the municipal level are culture affairs, recreational programmes and technical operations such as energy distribution. In the local elections held every fourth year, citizens are entitled to vote for candidates representing different political parties, which are to occupy the municipal council - “kommunfullmäktige” - the decision-making body in the Swedish kommun. According to the Local Government Act, all municipalities are free to decide the number of political members of their local council. The number of representatives is, however, not allowed to be less than 31. The council appoints a chairman among its members and elects an executive board, which is to prepare most decisions made by the council, draft the annual budget and supervise the administration of local government affairs. The board must have at least five members but normally has a few more than that, and is headed by the municipal commissioner who is the highest political representative of the municipality and usually belongs to the biggest party. Along with the council and the board, the Swedish kommun also appoints specialised political committees that ensure that operations in their respective fields of responsibility comply with the objectives and guidelines approved by the council. They also prepare items for decision-making by the municipal council and then implement the actual decision. In choosing members of the different political institutions, the principle of proportional allocation of seats is

always applied. This means that the composition of the council, the board and the committees on the municipal level - but also on the county and the national level - largely reflect the party sympathies expressed in the latest political election.

*The County.* The second level of the Swedish local self-government is the county level, including 20 political-administrative entities - 18 county councils and two regions. The average number of inhabitants within these units is approximately 440 000, and their main responsibilities include the providing of all health and medical care/services. In addition, the county councils and the regions are also responsible for various forms of education at training colleges, public transport and communication, spatial planning, regional development as well as tourism and cultural life in the county. The political organisation on the county level is in many ways similar to the organisation of the municipalities. Elections are held every fourth year to the legislative political councils, which consist of candidates representing different political parties. Just as the municipal council, the county council appoints an executive board as well as committees, specialised in different fields of competences.

Moreover, on the county level the state is represented by the county administrative board, which can be described as being the prolonged arm of the state. The county administrative board has some supervising functions and is carrying out state policies. The head of the board is the governor who is appointed by the national government, while the rest of the members are chosen either by the county council or by the governor himself/herself.

In 1992, a parliamentary committee was set up in order to formulate proposals for stronger regional cooperation. For this reason a regional experiment - a pilot project - was launched in order to test stronger regional entities, deepen the democracy by decentralising decisions, and stimulate the creation of competitive and dynamic regions. Four pilot regions with extended authority were taking part over the test period 1997-2002; one of these the created "Regional Council of Kalmar County". Today, when the test period is finished, the Regional Council of Kalmar County is still functioning together with eight similar - directly or indirectly elected - regional institutions in Sweden. "Region Blekinge" is one of these new entities, initiated from January 2003, which functions *together with* the county council and the county administration board on the regional level. The political representatives in the Regional Council of Kalmar County and Region Blekinge are appointed in indirect elections by the members, that are the county council and the municipalities in each region. The new

regional entities are, first and foremost, cooperating around issues such as spatial planning, sustainable policy-making, international cooperation and regional development.

The political parties are of central importance to the Swedish democracy. The party system was for long one of the most stable in the western world and one can say that very much of political interest, engagement and involvement have been built around the strong party structures. The Swedish parties identify fairly strongly with basic ideological values and beliefs, and still play a crucial role in opinion-making and in fulfilling essential tasks in the society. In the local, regional and national elections, all seven nation-wide parties are taking part, but smaller parties are also present in some of the municipal elections. No independents or individual candidates are allowed in the elections. All candidates that are running for office must belong to one or another of the registered political parties in Sweden. In recent decades, the party system has however started to loosen up and show significant signs of fragmentation as well as difficulties to attract regular citizens. People tend to think that individual views and opinions are lost within the huge party organisations and, in addition, the party memberships have fallen heavily in numbers from 631 000 in 1991 to 409 000 in 1999.

### **Financial conditions**

Since local and regional self-government have long traditions in Sweden and most of public decision-making powers are decentralised to those levels, the expenditures of Swedish municipalities and county councils are very high. They amount to 26 % (2000) of the Gross Domestic Products, which is one of the highest shares of all countries in the world. Consequently the municipalities and the county councils employ a big share of the labour force in Sweden; 23 % and 7 % respectively. The state sector is not employing more than 6 %. Education is the largest branch of municipal operations, accounting for 30 % of the total spending. The second largest is care of elderly and people with functional impairments (29 %) followed by child care (12 %). Health care and services for people with intellectual disabilities totally dominates the tasks of the county councils, accounting for 89 % of their operating expenditures. Municipalities and county councils can theoretically derive its revenues from several different sources, such as: local taxes of its own, shared grants, block grants and special-purpose grants from the state, fees etc. Since both of the self-governing authorities have the right to independently levy income tax from the local residents, this kind of revenue constitutes by far the biggest source of income for the municipalities (56 % of the total incomes) and the county councils (66 %). The independence of sub-

national self-governments is greatest when revenues originate from their own local tax base and they themselves can decide the tax rate. In this respect, the Swedish system performs well in an international comparison.

### **The ordinary citizen and ways to take part in the political process**

The Swedish democratic system is stable but is - as discussed above - currently experiencing a number of challenges, such as lack of public confidence in the political representatives, a decreasing number of people willing to engage in the political parties and to take part in the regular elections every four years. In a study from 1995, as many as 70 % expressed some kind of disbelief or distrust in the elected representatives on national level in Sweden, and the voting rate (around 80 %) in the election of 2002 was the lowest in the post-war period. Regarding the political elections, all persons from 18 years of age with a Swedish citizenship are entitled to take part in the process of electing local, regional and national candidates. Since 1976, foreign citizens have been entitled to vote in the municipal and county council elections, provided they have been registered as Swedish residents for at least three years preceding the election. Those who are entitled to vote may also run for seats in the councils. All candidates running for office must represent a political party - no one is allowed to run as an independent or an individual candidate. Beginning with the 1998 election, voters are however entitled to cast a separate vote for one specific candidate who is representing the political party preferred and chosen by the voter.

In the Swedish political society, the average local politician can - greatly simplified - be described as a well educated middle-aged man from the middle class. Four categories of the most underrepresented social clusters can be distinguished; women, young people, private sector employees and immigrants. Focusing all members of the municipal councils in Sweden it is concluded that (a) 42 % are women, which is far better than in most countries outside the Nordic area, (b) only 1 % is between 18 and 21 years of age, while (c) almost half of all local representatives are 51 to 64 years old. Studying the civic society instead of the political, Swedes have long traditions of being involved in different kind of civic organisations, associations, labour unions, NGOs etc. In 2000, as many as 90 % of all Swedes from 16 years of age were registered in at least one organisation, while 44 % were regarded as "active members". In some cases, civic groups or organisations provide public services that are contracted out by the municipalities or the county councils. Such contracts or programmes are found mainly in the recreational and the social sector.

All political council meetings are open for the general public to visit. In addition, all members of a municipality or county council area are entitled to lodge local appeals. This system is regarded as a democratic safeguard for citizens in order to ensure that the political authorities make decisions in accordance with the Swedish law. National referendums can be either consultative or binding and as yet, only five consultative referendums have taken place. Local referendums can only be consultative and to date they have been used in about 30-35 cases. By signing a petition, five percent of the members of a municipality or county council district may ask the council to hold a referendum on a given topic. The council is, however, not obligated to hold the referendum, but decides for itself whether such a vote should take place. Since 1994, some sixty citizen initiatives have been submitted, but only in one case did a majority of the council approve the holding of a referendum as a consequence of the initiative.

“The principle of public access to official documents” implies that all files of any administrative office are open for the press and private citizens if not classed as “secret” for reasons related to military security, international relations or the privacy of the individuals concerned. Nobody is obliged to justify his or her wish to see a public document or to reveal his or her identity in order to obtain access to the document. Anyone denied access to an official document may lodge an appeal against the agency’s decision.

### **The future – problems, possibilities and views on the European Union**

Sweden became a member of the EU in 1995, together with Austria and Finland. At that time, Sweden was split into two major blocs - one bloc who voted for a Swedish membership in the 1994 national referendum and one bloc who regarded the EU fusion as something negative for the Swedish independence. Today, feelings are still very mixed in the Swedish society. The past eight years of cooperation as an official EU member has meant both political as well as economical challenges for Sweden, and today the pro-EU movement is still just slightly stronger than the more negatives. The internal EU debate has been relatively lively since the accession. This was confirmed in the debate before the EMU-referendum in September 2003 resulting in a majority of 62 % voting against Sweden joining the euro (the third and final step of the EMU). This far the EU membership can not be said to have had obvious negative effects on the Swedish local self-government. Some people on the municipal level argue that EU is not the threat in this case, but rather the Swedish state which in the last years has initialised some nationalising reforms.

Ms. Gunbritt Öhlén, director of the Association of Local Authorities in the County of Kronoberg, expressed some positive opinions regarding the international cooperation through ERB and the way the municipalities in Kronoberg have handled the new challenges following the EU membership. The municipalities have taken advantage of the Structural Funds and have become more and more willing to participate in new transnational networks and projects. Many of the local politicians in the south-east of Sweden, she argued, have today realised the importance of closer contacts with the regions around the Baltic Sea. She also stressed the differentiated industry and the low unemployment rate as positive features for the County of Kronoberg. Due to a great variety of small and medium-sized industries and enterprises, the unemployment rate is among the lowest in the whole of Sweden. There are, however, threats and difficulties linked with the near future too. Ms. Öhlén expressed some worries regarding today's population structure, which in many ways is receding with young people leaving Kronoberg (and south-east of Sweden) for the core areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. She also pointed out that these three major regions get a lot of attention in Sweden of today, which put Kronoberg in a more or less peripheral position. Today it is much harder to get sufficient financial support for state investments in the region, and on the whole it is relatively difficult to speak with a powerful voice on the national arena. In addition, the access to different kinds of regional development funds is quite limited for the County of Kronoberg, which sometimes makes it difficult to involve in large-scale national or EU projects.

# Some concluding remarks

## regarding the democracy in Euroregion Baltic

In this report concerning democracy issues in Euroregion Baltic, we have been able to study some basic data and statistics for each of the six ERB countries (part 1) and more qualitatively explore how the democracy is structured and realised in Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden (part 2). First and foremost the presentation has highlighted democratic aspects on the local and regional level, but obvious features noticed on the national level have also been important to investigate in order to make a more complete description. As stated in the introduction, the aim of the report has *not* been to compare the ERB members with each other or to point out that one region is “better” or “more democratic” than another. On the contrary, the study has tried to show that the democratic system can be organised in several well-functioning ways depending on country-specific history, traditions, values and public demands.

In this last part of the report, the intention is to make some concluding remarks concerning the democracy in ERB as it has been described in the first two parts. The presentation will briefly point out some important differences and similarities between the systems, and facilitate some qualitative reflections on the findings. The section will follow the structure that was used in the country-specific presentations.

### **Background of today’s democracy**

In a transnational project like Seagull, much of the work is directed towards forming mutual goals, defining shared problems, agreeing through a common decision-making and - in the end - establishing a Joint Transnational Development Programme (JTDP). This is not a “mission impossible”, but of course a very delicate and challenging task that must be accomplished with a *long-run perspective* applied. The six countries within ERB have various experiences of the modern democracy of today. Some have long traditions with stable political institutions, while others just recently have

gained political independence with democratic components such as free elections, legitimate institutions, respect of human rights and public involvement in the joint development of society. The various experiences do automatically imply various interpretations of what “democracy” really is, what the concept stands for and what it *should* stand for. Should the true democracy be realised through the powerful state or does the strong local authority constitute the most important base of the democratic organisation? Is the elected politician the only appropriate carrier of today’s democracy or should direct democratic forums such as local referendums, polls and civic assemblies gain increased significance in the political decision-making? Is a high voting rate the ultimate proof of a well-functioning democracy or are there other important elements to consider? Is a robust party structure something good or is it something that hinders the expression of individual demands and beliefs? These are just a few questions that are important to think over. It is, however, crucial to underline that hardly anyone of the above questions can be answered with a distinct and single yes or no. The reality is much more complicated than that! Instead of applying an “either or” thinking, today’s modern democracy must probably entail both state initiatives *and* local self-governance, political decisions made by elected representatives *and* ordinary citizens via direct democratic forums, stable political parties *and* more voluntary and flexible forms for public engagement. In this respect, the above questions are put in a rather provocative way. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize the fact that the concept democracy can be interpreted in different ways and that the definition, in frequent cases, is closely related to country-specific settings and traditions. This is something very essential to remember in meetings, communication and joint decision-making between partners from different democratic contexts.

### **Political institutions and administrative division**

The structure of political-administrative levels and authorities differs quite a lot among the six ERB countries. One can distinguish both homogeneous unitary states as well as the Russian form of government based on a federative Constitution. All countries have identifiable political institutions on the local and regional levels, but some also have sub-municipal authorities and/or an obvious district level positioned between the local and regional tier. The relationship between these political units and the state are often relatively difficult to describe. In some cases the relationship can be illustrated as an hourglass with a strong municipal level in combination with a much weaker region, in others like a wedge with a strong state at the expense of a sound local self-government. In most cases, issues like spatial planning and regional development (relevant for the construction of the JTDP) is handled on the regional level, but the responsible actor may differ from one country to another. In some

member-regions it is the representative council or the elected governor that is the most significant actor when it comes to regional planning and policy-making - in other cases it is the state-appointed county administrative board.

The regions and municipalities within ERB are of different size and having various political as well as financial powers. The Latvian municipality, for instance, is a rather small unit holding 4 300 inhabitants on average, while the local authority in Lithuania is much bigger holding approximately 61 700 citizens. The same discussion can be related to the regional level with the regions of Poland and Russia as the largest units. Generally speaking, almost all the municipalities within ERB share the same duties and are responsible for the same kind of provision of services to the local residents. Typical tasks for the municipalities are social services, education, care of children and elderly, technical issues like heating, housing and water supply, recreational and cultural affairs, etc. The regional level, on the contrary, more often deals with health care and medical services, but also transport, communication, spatial planning and regional development. In all the six countries, the municipal and regional authorities are carrying out a fairly wide range of public services. In some countries like in Denmark and Sweden this has been accompanied by the right to independently derive financial support to cover the costs, while in other countries the municipalities and regions are more dependent on grants and subsidies from the state (see further discussion below).

The internal political structure of the municipalities (and the regional authorities) differs from country to country, and so do distribution of powers, executive responsibilities, number of publicly elected bodies and so on. In many countries, the mayor (or the regional governor) constitutes the significant political leader who shares the duties with the elected council, the administration, the political committees etc. In almost all municipalities and regions, the representative council is formed by publicly elected councillors belonging to political parties or specific citizen lists. In addition, the executive body - the board or the mayor (governor) - is appointed by the councillors, but in some countries the latter is elected directly by the people in a popular vote. The relationship between the legislative and the executive bodies is often described by law or local statutes, and characterised by cooperation and mutual respect. In some cases, however, conflicts may arise between the two bodies - especially when both the representative and the executive powers are elected directly by the citizens and, thus, claim to represent the public will. In Russia, local citizens have the opportunity to participate in altogether six different elections organised on the local, regional and national level. In Latvia, the number of political elections are only two.

## **Financial conditions**

Since all the municipalities within ERB are responsible for almost the same kind of public services, the major sources of spending are similar in all the six countries. Costs related to education normally constitute the biggest share of the municipal spending, but social assistance, care of children and elderly and, in some cases, housing are also major expenditures. For the regional authorities within ERB, the major costs are usually related to health care and medical services but to a certain extent also to spatial planning and policy-making. Regarding the public incomes for the local and regional governments, the situation differs quite a lot between, on the one hand, the authorities that to a large extent derive their own revenues in order to cover the costs and, on the other hand, the authorities that do not have the right to levy the important income tax from the local residents but have to rely on grants and subsidies from the state.

The local governments in Denmark and Sweden have relatively long traditions of independence and of self-financing municipalities, while the sub-national authorities in Latvia, Lithuania and Russia are much more dependent on the relations to the state and, in some cases, on personal contacts and financial bargaining with the upper levels. The problems arise when the local decision-makers seek to please the state-appointed representatives rather than the voters. In this scenario, the local government that does not fulfil its election promises, may assign the blame to the lack of financial autonomy and the inadequate provision of state funds rather than taking responsibility for own actions and priorities. In accordance to this view, the local self-government can only be independent, strong and efficient when the local authority to a large extent decides for its own expenditures and has the right to control and collect those revenues that are needed in order to provide a sufficient level of welfare.

## **The ordinary citizen and ways to take part in the political process**

Although various democratic backgrounds, almost all the ERB countries are today experiencing smaller or greater difficulties such as (a) limited public confidence in the political system, (b) decreasing participation in the regular elections, (c) widespread beliefs that it is almost impossible to efficiently take part in the political process as a regular citizen, (d) views on the elected politicians as an isolated elite almost impossible to influence, and (e) obvious social groups/clusters that are underrepresented in the forums where decisions are made; especially young people, women and ethnical minorities. These difficulties are all threats to the modern democracy and must be taken seriously by all individuals that are eager to protect freedom, openness and a strong local democracy.

The organisation around strong political parties is a typical feature of the Swedish democratic system. In all the other countries the parties play important roles too - especially on the national level - but are to share the political scene with different kinds of citizen lists or independent candidates, which at times are running for office without ideological beliefs or the support of a huge party machinery. These kinds of independent actors - often targeted towards local or specific interests - serve as supplementing elements to the more stable party structures, and are well-equipped to catch individual opinions and wishes in times when engagement through political parties are considered to be inefficient or a “waste of valuable time”. The independent political actors can sometimes be confused with all the different Non-Governmental Organisations that are frequently present in the six ERB countries. Some of the NGOs are directed towards ideological issues such as human rights, environment or youth issues, while others are targeted towards more specific or practical tasks dealing with for instance social or labour issues. In some of the countries the latter are playing a crucial role in carrying out publicly financed municipal welfare services to the citizens, and in this way represent a tangible complement to the public engagement within party structures.

In addition to the political parties, citizen lists, NGOs and the regular elections, people living around the Baltic Sea have the opportunity to take part in the development of society in a number of different ways, such as: (a) attend open political meetings, (b) vote in local or national referendums, (c) express opinions via polls or public petitions, (d) arrange legal demonstrations, (e) use signature lists to create opinion, (f) lodge local appeals against political decisions, (g) use the mass media in order to express one’s mind, etc. How well these types of citizen initiatives are functioning is, of course, dependent on political settings and democratic stability. In many cases they have proved to be efficient tools for citizens to gain influence and to achieve political change. In many other cases, however, citizen initiatives have been hindered by political discrimination, undeveloped political institutions, ignorance of human freedoms and rights, a corrupt mass media or, just, elected decision-makers unwilling to give up political power. All the six ERB countries, and particularly the four new democracies, still have a lot to prove when it comes to the ordinary citizen and his or her opportunity to efficiently take part in the joint development of society.

### **The future – problems, possibilities and views on the European Union**

Among the six ERB countries, Denmark and Sweden have been members of the EU for several years. Latvia, Lithuania and Poland will join the Union during next year, while Russia is not aspiring to become a member for a foreseeable period of time. The public opinion about the cooperation

within EU is relatively divided among the countries. In Sweden, the pro-EU movement is still just slightly stronger than the more negatives, while as many as 91 % were positive to an EU membership in the Lithuanian referendum in May this year.

Several future opportunities and threats have been distinguished in the nine regions in Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden, and many of the expressed views and pictures unite a majority of the member-regions. Beginning with the stated difficulties, the regional unemployment rate (in some cases as high as 28 %) was regarded as something problematic, either in comparison with other regions in the actual country or in an international perspective. Almost all ERB regions also underlined the importance of working with development issues, such as entrepreneurship, conditions for small and medium-sized enterprises, tourism and higher education. In this way, it was emphasised, the regions will become more socially and economically prosperous and more attractive for people to live in. In most of the member-regions young people are today moving away from the actual region in order to study or find a job abroad or in specific core areas within the country. One important thing for the ERB members to work with, it was stressed, must therefore be to create an attractive and dynamic environment, so that young persons have something to return to after their studies or travelling. A number of regional advantages were also expressed among the six ERB members. Most of the regional representatives saw great opportunities with the future EU cooperation, and emphasised the access to the EU Structural Funds as well as the access to a closer network of international partners. The collaboration within the frames of ERB was perceived as something important for all the member-regions - not at least when it comes to the development and further improvement of the democracy around the Baltic Sea.

# Comments on the statistics

In the first part of the report - page 12-13 - some basic data and statistics are presented for each of the six ERB countries as a whole. The part constituted an overview of interesting and important aspects of the democracy on the national level, which enabled some basic comparisons between the countries around the Baltic Sea. Some further remarks are, however, needed in order to provide a fair presentation.

**Population & Population growth rate.** Data from 2002, Central Intelligence Agency.

**Urban population.** Data from 1999, Landguiden.

**Largest ethnic groups.** Denmark and Sweden; data from 2001, Landguiden. Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia; data from 2002, Central Intelligence Agency.

**Average length of life, men/women.** Data from 2002, Central Intelligence Agency.

**Last/Next election, Head of State.** No data for Denmark and Sweden since no elections are taking part.

**Participation in election, Head of State.** No data for Denmark and Sweden since no elections are taking part. No data for Latvia since the Head of State is elected by the national parliament - not through a public vote. Data for Lithuania, Poland and Russia reflecting the last election, collected via the contact persons and national statistics in the three countries.

**Participation in elections, national parliament.** Data reflecting the last election, collected via the contact persons and national statistics in the six countries.

**Number of seats, national parliament.** Data from 2002, Central Intelligence Agency.

**Two biggest parties, national parliament.** Figures reflecting the percentage of total seats in the national parliament (the representative chamber). Data collected via national statistics in the six countries.

**Share of men/women in the national government.** Data from 1998, Landguiden.

**Number of regions/counties, districts and municipalities.** Data collected via the contact persons and the most recent national statistics in the six countries.

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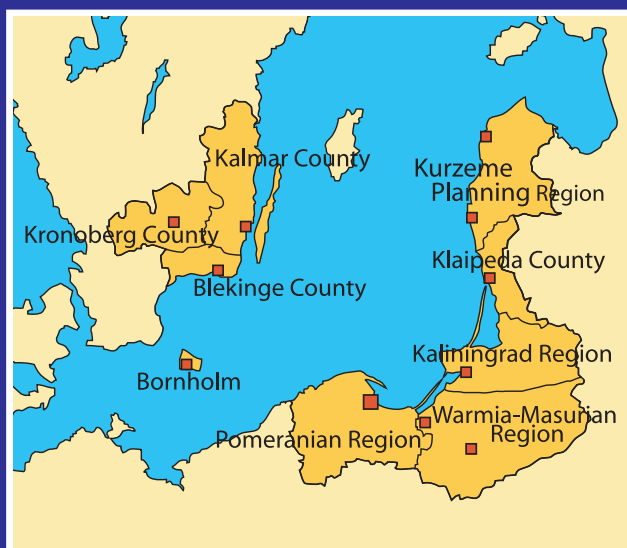






Seagull is a project for the Euroregion Baltic (ERB) with the main purpose of developing and anchoring a long-term strategy and a joint transnational development programme (JTDP) for the region. The programme will form the basis for future investments in the environment and infrastructure, for building networks of innovative environments such as science parks, for development and cooperation of industrial clusters in the region, etc. It will thereby contribute to social, economic and environmentally sustainable development throughout the region.

[www.eurobalt.org](http://www.eurobalt.org)



This report – Democracy in Euroregion Baltic (ERB) – is the first presented report from the Seagull project. It gives an overview of the democratic structures in the six countries with member regions of ERB.



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