

Introduction: What is INTERREG III B Neighbourhood programme in the Baltic Sea Region?

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) INTERREG III B Neighbourhood Programme belongs to one of the three strands of the European Community Initiative INTERREG III. These programmes address transnational co-operation and intend to encourage harmonious and balanced development of the European territory.

There are numerous networks, organisations and political initiatives linking up the Baltic Sea Region. They are actively contributing to building up joint development strategies. Subsequently, transnational INTERREG III B cooperation projects are based on concepts like the Second Northern Dimension Action Plan, VASAB 2010 strategies, as well as, for example, the programmes of HELCOM and Baltic 21.

The Baltic Sea Region's III B cooperation area includes eleven countries separated by numerous land and sea borders. In 2004, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania received a new status: the members of the European Union. From 1 January 2004 partners from those countries are fully eligible to apply for ERDF. At the same time, the Baltic Sea Region's INTERREG III B programme is transformed into a "Neighbourhood" programme allowing EU partners to apply to INTERREG, and Russian and Belarusian partners to apply for Tacis funds in one joint project proposal. Norway has traditionally been participating in the Baltic Sea cooperation on equal terms as EU countries

Funding & timeframe

On the EU side, the programme is sponsored by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), as part of the EU Structural Funds, and co-financed by project partners. The total ERDF contribution is almost 149 Million Euro. Norway co-finances Norwegian partners with 6 Million Euro. For period 2004-2006 allocation of external funding (Tacis) is 7,5 Million Euro for partners from Russia and Belarus. The first call for proposal under the Neighbourhood Programme is open from 25 July to 23 September 2005.

More on Neighbourhood Programme

As the next step in direction of the new Neighbourhood Instrument, the European Commission introduced in 2003 new Neighbourhood Programmes (NP) (2004-2006) with joint application, selection and approval procedure for all (EU and non-EU) projects partners. The NP is a transition programme to develop a Neighbourhood Instrument operating for the next programme period (2007-2013). During the 2004-2006 period the COM (EC Delegations) will be still responsible for the external funding (Tacis) implementation while the Member States (Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat) will be responsible for the internal funding (ERDF) implementation.

What are projects doing under INTERREG III B?

By now 100 projects are approved, their implementation is well under way, and first results can be reported. It is interesting to know that these **83 projects involve more than 2000 partners** from all 11 countries. They absorb around 104 Million Euro from ERDF and Norwegian funds. Description of approved projects is available on Programme's website: www.bsrinterreg.net

Co-operation topics

The projects address topics identified under the priorities and measures of the programme:

- strategies and actions for macro-regions
- sustainable development of sectors (e.g. tourism, energy)
- integrated management of coastal zones, islands and other specific areas

- polycentric settlement structures
- communication links
- management of natural and cultural heritage and natural resources
- institution and capacity building.

According to the decision of the European Commission two IIIA priorities Estonia-Latvia-Russia ('North') and Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ('South') were included in the BSR INTERREG III B programme. However in practice both IIIA priorities operate as separate programmes within the BSR INTERREG III B Neighbourhood programme management structure.

Activities

INTERREG III B does not finance large infrastructure investments but paves the way towards them. Eligible activities are, for example, the exchange of experience between partners from different countries on development concepts. Projects implement and evaluate pilot actions, make analyses such as market research, or build up information or marketing networks. With the introduction of the Neighbourhood programme, especially priority 3 was amended and included wide range of topics that were incorporated from the Tacis CBC programme. Under priority 3 are two measure 3.1 that promotes transnational cooperation and measure 3.2. supports bilateral cooperation across maritime borders of the Baltic Sea. Activities included in both measure are very similar to those that were funded under the Tacis CBC programme in preceding years.

Project partners

Main partners are public authorities from national, regional, and local level, research and training institutions, foundations, NGOs and other non-profit organisations.

How to make best use of what transnational projects have achieved?

Building up transnational cooperation projects takes time! Projects confirm that, in order to achieve durable results, politicians and decision-makers but also the public should be involved already when defining the project's aims. Society and politicians are interested in concrete results. They want to know what type of investment will really benefit their region thus attracting new business, or how many new tourists will discover their area by using a joint a marketing platform. Sell results before you get them – and get them! This is the key to make best use of joint work under INTERREG.

Programme management structure

The Monitoring Committee (MC) consists of representatives from all BSR countries (11). The MC oversees the use of ERDF funds.

The Steering Committee (SC) consists of representatives from all BSR countries (11) with equal voting rights. SC selects projects to be granted from ERDF.

The National Sub-committees: each country should establish a National sub-committee, that have an advisory status and communicate the local/regional level opinion with the SC representatives.

The Investitionsbank Schleswig-Holstein (IB), seated at Kiel/Germany, acts as Managing (MA) and Paying Authority (PA). MA/PA is a legal body responsible for programme implementation and payments to project partners. IB is a state owned development bank governed by public law. All ERDF funds are pooled in a joint bank account managed by the IB.

The Joint Secretariat (JS) is hosted by the IB. The JS has its offices in Rostock/Germany and Karlskrona/Sweden and Riga/Latvia. The JS is responsible for day-to-day management of programme implementation. The JS advises on INTERREG/Tacis co-operation, assists project generation, assesses applications, monitors progress and payment requests, operates the website, and services the programme's decision making bodies and working groups.

Further information

If you wish to know more about the BSR INTERREG III B Neighbourhood Programme and BSR co-operation, or if you want to see more projects in progress or check up project ideas, please visit our web site at www.bsrinterreg.net.

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