

## **NEEBOR as a good practice on Brussel's forum of Eastern Partnership.**

On 16th of June in Brussels the Committee of the Regions launched a forum dedicated to local and regional dimension of the Eastern Partnership.

The partnership is a new European Union proposal for extending the cooperation with its eastern neighbors: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The EU wants to step up its efforts to integrate these countries in the European culture and economy in order to better and more effective cooperation in the future. On the first day of the forum was attended by politicians and representatives of European institutions, whose commitment to issues related to the Eastern Partnership initiative in Brussels is widely known.

This group included among others Polish and Swedish ambassadors to the EU. The Partnership is a joint, a successful proposal for both countries and almost with no objection has been accepted by the other EU Member States. Forum open to senior representatives of the European Commission, which in December last year came with a proposal for the implementation of the Polish-Swedish initiative. Also present were representatives of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

Committee was represented by its chairman, **Luc Van den Brande**, and **Istvan Serto-Radics**, President of the Commission for External Relations. Among many panelists Mr. **Lászlo Gazda**, President of the Eszak-Alföld Regional Development Council from Hungary took part in the expert panel discussion devoted to territorial co-operation and development of economic initiative of the countries included in the Eastern Partnership. Mr. Gazda considered that more focus should concentrate on the existing networks like **NEEBOR - Network of Eastern External Border Regions** which could be very useful tool to imitate project proposals in the future calls. As one of the best examples presented by the panelist was **NEEBOR project (Networking for Enterprises in the Eastern External Border Regions)** which has grown out from the network, from European countries on the external borders of the European Union, who decided to work more closely together and to elaborate joint actions for their common challenges. The specific objectives of the project are to develop a clear understanding of the external border regions' key challenges, key strategies, key actors and key actions on SME development and innovation; to exchange good practices which can help to unlock business potential in these regions as cross border business cooperation, access to finance and knowledge for SMEs; to exchange and exploit experiences on these areas through successful seminars, study visits, staff exchange and transferability actions; to develop joint methodologies and give policy recommendations on the above mentioned areas; to deepen the relations among the external border regions, and to upgrade their networking capacity.

The forum was attended by representatives of the partner countries: Belarus, Ukraine and Azerbaijan who spoke about their hopes related to the implementation of this initiative in the future as well as existing support it received from the EU under the ENP. A representative of the Ukrainian Association of Regions and Cities, said that without the support of Europe would not be the first cluster, and other important initiatives for regional economic development and our neighbors.

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