



Joensuu Declaration

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After the EU enlargement in 2004 the eastern external borderline of the European Union has shifted some 500 kilometres towards the east in Central Europe bringing such countries as Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus towards the EU as neighbouring countries. The current eastern external border of the European Union stretches from the Barents Sea to the Mediterranean, and along the 5.500 kilometres, it embraces 12 member states of the EU all the way from Finnish Lapland to Cyprus (Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland). The number of regions which currently have an external land-based border line, amounts to more than 60.

Acknowledging those challenges and opportunities that the location by the EU external borderline creates, 26 territorial authorities came up with a common initiative to establish the Network of Eastern External Border Regions - NEEBOR in December 2005. Today there are 33 members in the network.

The network is **an interregional bottom-up initiative** that aims at:

- increasing cooperation between its member regions
- improving visibility and understanding of external border issues.

The Joensuu annual conference of 2009 brings together the decision-makers of the border regions and the EU for the fourth time, this year to discuss the aspects of safety, security and economic cooperation in the context of NEEBOR.

In this framework NEEBOR sees that the EU has functioned as an important actor in bringing peace and stability to the whole European Union. The EU has also contributed significantly to the safety and prosperity of the Eastern border and regions located in the area. It is vitally important that the EU continues its joint efforts in working together to guarantee the stable situation in the future too. This can be achieved by enhancing internal cooperation between EU countries and also increasing external cooperation with EU's eastern neighbours.

For that reason, **NEEBOR supports EU's Eastern Partnership initiative**. The partnership is to be a forum for discussion and action concerning visa agreements, free trade deals and strategic partnership agreements with the EU's eastern neighbours. Furthermore, the Northern Dimension and



the Baltic Sea Strategy in the North and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in the South are also significant initiatives that give added value to the cooperation in the EU's eastern external border.

Prosperity and sustainability by the eastern border area require several types of cooperation. Different authorities must work together across borders to guarantee the best possible result for both the EU and the neighbouring countries. Having secure borders is essential, but the EU needs neighbours to tackle global challenges.

Safety and Security by the EU Eastern External Borderline

NEEBOR sees that:

- The eastern external borderline is the only actual long land border that EU has with other countries. This creates many opportunities, but also poses many challenges when it comes to border security for example.
- Many good steps have been already taken, and the EU should develop its police and border guard cooperation even further. Exchange of information between these organizations in the EU area is essential and the systems and procedures should be made more compatible. However it must be stressed that when exchanging information, human rights and data protection laws must be fully respected.
- Preventing external organized crime from entering and nesting in the EU area is one of the main challenges of the border control. Furthermore it is essential to stop both human trafficking and the influx of drugs and other unwanted material in the EU eastern borderline. The EU as well as national governments must grant sufficient resources for this work.
- There are many new challenges for the border security that did not necessarily exist before. The number of refugees from war-waging countries has been increasing steadily and the regions and countries by the eastern external border must prepare themselves better for such situations. The challenge with illegal migrants must also be tackled with new and innovative methods. The EU should increase its efforts in making its nearby areas steady and viable, so that the illegal immigrants and refugees would have a possibility for a good life in their own countries. Also other factors such as smuggling and terrorism add to the importance of cooperation in these fields.

Economic Cooperation Ensures Future Growth and Prosperity

NEEBOR states that:

- The EU has and has had many good initiatives and programmes that support the economic development and cooperation in the border areas. NEEBOR network sees that such emphasis should be maintained in the future as well in the form of cohesion policy based on solidarity. Also, it is important to support such areas that experience permanent difficulty in the form of for example long distances, challenging climate, and demographic change.

- Moreover, innovation and creativity must be promoted and made possible in order to develop the regions and give them tools for the further growth. The exchange of best practices is also an important method for regional development. In that way new innovations can be taken aboard more easily and valuable resources can be used sensibly.

SMEs are the backbone of the European Union as they represent some 99% of all companies and also employ approximately 65 million people. Their significance for the regions is apparent. The vitality of SMEs contributes to development of the regions. NEEBOR network launched a project on SME development in the framework of Interreg IVC programme in 2008. The overall objective of the project is to exchange and exploit solutions for a more innovative and competitive SME sector, while increasing the efficiency of regional development policies on innovation and business support in the eastern external border area. The project concentrates on partnership, cross-border business cooperation, access to finance, and access to knowledge.

The European Union should continue supporting SMEs and entrepreneurship. SMEs should be especially equipped with better resources and they should be given more tools to enhance cross-border cooperation with their EU and non-EU counterparts. Also, bureaucracy that SMEs face should be reduced. Entrepreneurship education should also be given more resources and attention. NEEBOR considers the Small Business Act as an important tool in achieving these goals.

With this Joensuu declaration the NEEBOR network:

- **sees** that long-term solutions contributing to the safety and security of the eastern external borderline can only be achieved by close cooperation between the member countries.
- **sees** that the EU should reserve sufficient resources for interregional and transnational cooperation in the future and develop cross-border cooperation further to support the border areas of the EU.
- **welcomes** the initiative of Eastern Partnership and sees that further cooperation with the EU's eastern neighbours is needed.
- **states** that the European Union should continue supporting SMEs and entrepreneurship strongly. SMEs should be given better resources and more tools for cross-border cooperation with their EU and non-EU counterparts.
- **states** that bureaucracy concerning SMEs should be reduced in the spirit of Small Business Act.
- **sees** that different visa procedures should be reviewed and developed to enhance cross-border cooperation.
- **underlines** that accessibility is one of the key factors in SME development. The NEEBOR's Olsztyn declaration on transport infrastructure presented at the Annual Conference in 2007 made an important message on the limited accessibility of the eastern border areas. The declaration offered solutions, which should be followed to improve the situation.