

**THE 5TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL RUSSIA/EU/NORWAY CROSS-BORDER
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**ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS IN CBC – HOW TO CREATE OPTIMUM CONDITIONS
FOR EFFECTIVE COOPERATION**

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Mr/Ms Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Finnish Government I want to extend my best wishes and all success to this 5th annual conference on EU – Russia cross-border cooperation.

In my address I shall attempt to concentrate on our view on the role of Governments in CBC on the eastern border of the European Union.

By definition cross-border cooperation is something that the regions on both sides of a particular border are responsible for. The role of the governments is less important. At some European borders cross-border cooperation has been developed to a point, where national borders have become irrelevant in many ways. This, however, is not the case on the EU-Russian Border where crossing the border is something you are guaranteed to notice and will remain so in the foreseeable future.

At the external borders of the European Union the presence of national or federal authorities is naturally much stronger than on internal Schengen-type borders where police, customs or border guard activities are less visible. The governments have a special responsibility for the security of the border regions and the whole Union. They shall – more than on the internal borders – actively assist and facilitate conditions for cross-border cooperation. Obstacles caused by a less transparent border need to be compensated to these border regions.

The governments have to establish special arrangements and grant necessary competences to the border regions. When the framework for contacts across the border has been provided for by the governments, the regions concerned shall jointly identify the problems and possibilities and implement the cooperation measures required according to the analysis they have produced together. One good example is the Network of Eastern External Border Regions, so called NEEBOR network. NEEBOR serves as a platform for open dialogue and coordination of joint actions and initiatives in order to promote the exchange of good practices and enhance cooperation and synergy in the external border regions.

In preparations for the ongoing EU Programming period 2007 – 2013 the objective was a single Community financing instrument using uniform rules on both sides of the border and based on equal partnership in accordance with the experiences gained with the Neighbourhood Programmes. The result was the Cross-Border Component of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, commonly known as ENPI CBC.

Preparations for the three Finnish-Russian ENPI CBC Programmes – South-East Finland–Russia, Karelia and Kolarctic – began in the spring of 2006. The Commission adopted the Programmes only in December 2008. Unfortunately the implementation of the Programmes has been further delayed because the necessary Financing Agreements between the Russian Federation and the European Commission have not been concluded despite negotiations that began already in 2007.

The Finnish government has done its utmost to facilitate these negotiations. As a last resort, it invited the parties and the EU Members States concerned to an informal meeting in Hämeenlinna, Finland just before the Midsummer this year. After two

days of intensive negotiations all the open issues were resolved and the road was clear for conclusion of the agreements.

We hope and expect that the three Financing Agreements concerning the Finnish Programmes will be signed as soon as possible without any unnecessary delays. We also hope that the Agreements of the other Programmes will follow soon after. It is understood that the Russian Duma will ratify the agreements by the end of this year. After this, the implementation can finally begin, almost halfway through the Programming Period. Any further delay would endanger all Community and state co-financing and other support to cross-border cooperation on the EU-Russian border areas, which would be fatal.

If the Programmes can be launched, it will soon be the time to begin discussions for post-2013. Experiences gained from the Neighbourhood Programmes and the ENPI CBC must be fully evaluated. We cannot afford an equally complicated system again!

The EU will sharpen its own regional agenda through the Baltic Sea Region Strategy. The Strategy includes also elements of the external dimension, bearing in mind that it constitutes only a sub-plot in the main narrative. The sharpened approach shall be reflected also in the post-2013 financial instruments. The EU should further develop its financial instruments to promote regional co-operation on its external borders. The instruments should be based on common principles, but tailored to reflect specific characteristics of each region.

We have learned that cross-border cooperation between EU and Russian border regions must be based on full equality. This presupposes availability of Russian national co-financing sources for the Programmes and adoption of relevant national and Community legislation.

More than the other actors involved Finland has highlighted the central role of the regions in defining the priorities and reaping the rewards for cross-border cooperation. We have consciously adopted perhaps an over-idealistic position in this issue but we really can't see why external border regions should be subjected to negative circumstances for reasons beyond their control.

European Union and Russia are both global actors which encounter each other every day in different parts of the world. Mostly they work together but sometimes their interests can differ. If more difficult periods in relations arise, they tend unfortunately to be reflected everywhere, including in cross-border cooperation.

We should all work towards a situation where general foreign policy fluctuations don't unnecessarily complicate the situation in the border regions. Once cross-border programmes have been launched, they should be implemented strictly on regional level without interference from the capitals. It is the duty of the states and governments to assist and facilitate this cooperation, not to obstruct it. Everyone involved should recognise that cross-border cooperation is always advantageous – not only to the border regions but also to the countries in question – in promoting economic and social development and stability in peripheral border areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen! The issues related to cross-border cooperation on the Finnish-Russian border are extremely important to our government and we are prepared to invest a lot of effort to promote them. This was reflected in us organising the Hämeenlinna back-to-back negotiations and also in high-level correspondence between the heads of Finnish and Russian governments.

I am convinced that I can express on behalf of all parties concerned the sincere wish that the final obstacles to implementation of ENPI CBC Programmes on the EU-Russia border regions will be expediently removed and the regions can regain the

main responsibility from the governments. This conference has fulfilled its task only if it has moved us closer to that goal.

Thank you.