

B7 arranges seminar in Tallinn – "Estonia: Developing as an EU Member"

This year's first B7 event was held the 21 of January in Tallinn Estonia. The B7 organised a seminar with some of the key Estonian actors under the theme "Estonia developing as an EU member".

The seminar laid focus on the challenges of regional cross border cooperation in Europe from an Estonian point of view. Cooperation between regions is a prioritised issue in the European Union and the Cohesion Policy shows that cross boarder collaboration will be highlighted in the new structural funds. Cooperation is also what the B7 is all about. However there are several question marks for Estonian regions interested in expanding their horizons, in particular the issue on co financing the structural funds available.

The administrative division of territory in Estonia is divided into counties, rural municipalities and cities. The county governors and the government agencies carry out the state administration in the counties pursuant to law. Local governments carry out local administration in the rural municipalities and in the cities. The County is an administrative unit representing the central government at local level; there is no elected regional level. This structure is complicating cooperation between regions, as there is no regional autonomy and no financing for projects at the regional level.

However improvements are being made explains Ms. Einike Uri, Vice Chancellor for the Ministry of Interior and Regional Affairs in Estonia. The initiative from the government is to have a special financial line for international cooperation tied to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for next year. Possibly, some of this money will be marked for international cooperation projects in the regions. Expectantly, this will make things easier for Estonian

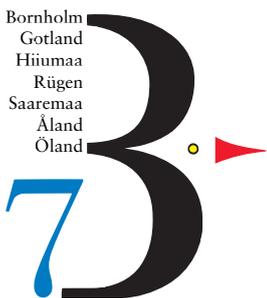
regions interested in participating in the EU interregional cooperation schemes.

Estonia never had a specific strategy concerning cross boarder cooperation and what's more the Estonian Development Policy had to be modified last year due to the EU membership and the demands of the Cohesion Policy. A difficulty in this work was and still is that the policy framework in Estonia is old and not adapted to the new system and regulations on regional development. There is a vast need for legal support to make changes necessary to adapt to union standard.

The discussion on regional cooperation gave the B7 representatives a valuable understanding of the Estonian system of regions and state governing.

– The seminar not only gave us an opportunity to highlight difficulties but also to contribute towards finding solutions by presenting good examples of what is already being done in the Baltic Sea Region say's, the B7 Chairperson Mr Claes Kullberg.

Hanna Waluszewski
B7 Secretariat



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