

## **Estonia – Russia cross-border cooperation programme 2021-2027**

### **DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PROPOSED CHALLENGES, ACTIVITIES AND INDICATORS FOR SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

**Date:** 12 November 2020.

**Format:** online in Zoom environment.

**Participants:** 28 persons (11 from Russia and 4 from Estonia, 2 experts and 11 programme representatives)

#### **Introduction and methodology**

The discussion was part of the stakeholder involvement activities that took place during the programming process of the Estonia – Russia Cross-border Cooperation Programme for the period 2021-2027 (EE-RU CBC Programme). The programming started in the beginning of the year 2020 and is planned to be completed in 2021.

The stage 1 of the stakeholder consultations was carried out by the national authorities of the EE-RU CBC Programme during the period March - June 2020.

During the stage 1 the national authorities of both countries collected problems, challenges and activities that could be tackled by the EE-RU CBC Programme. These actions covered wide range of stakeholders both on the Russian and Estonian side of the programme area, including regional authorities and local municipalities, educational institutions, entrepreneurship support institutions and environmental authorities. Based on the materials collected during the stage 1, the Joint Programming Committee (JPC) of the EE-RU CBC Programme pre-selected 9 specific objectives for the next programme. The choice of specific objectives was based on the list of specific objectives proposed by the European Commission.

The stage 2 of the stakeholder consultations took place from September 2020. It was carried out by the external experts Elena Belova and Peeter Unt from Gravitas Consult, and focused on the 9 pre-selected specific objectives. It contained over 50 thematically focused individual interviews, group interviews and interventions at workshops.

The stage 3 of the stakeholder consultations started in parallel with the stage 2 in November 2020 and consists of thematic online joint discussions for stakeholders from Estonia and Russia based on the pre-defined by the JPC specific objectives. The input for the joint online discussions was gathered during the stages 1 and 2.

The discussion on 12 November 2020 was based on the discussion paper that was sent to the participants of the meeting together with the invitation approximately 2 weeks prior the online discussion. The discussion paper included:

1. A short overview about the programming process for the 2021-2027 period.
2. The main identified challenges in the field of entrepreneurship that could be addressed with the help of cross-border cooperation.

The challenges were identified in the frames of two specific objectives that had been pre-selected by the Joint Programming Committee of the EE-RU CBC Programme.

These specific objectives (SO) were:

- a. SO1: Enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies.
  - b. SO2: Enhancing growth and competitiveness of SMEs, including by productive investments.
3. Draft list of activities that could be supported by the EE-RU CBC programme under SO1 and SO2.
  4. Draft output and result indicators proposed for SO1 and SO2.

The discussion paper had been drafted based on the three main sources:

- Stakeholder consultations that had been carried out by the national authorities of the EE-RU CBC Programme in the programme regions in spring-summer 2020.
- Stakeholder consultations that had been carried out by the programming experts among Russian and Estonian entrepreneurship promoters in September-October 2020.
- Regional and national strategies of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Estonia that promote the development of entrepreneurship.

The discussion was guided by the three questions listed in the discussion paper:

1. What is your opinion on the identified challenges? Would you like to bring out additional challenges?
2. Do you think the activities of the SOs 1 and 2 are realistic and meet the challenges and needs? Are those activities appropriate for strengthening the cooperation links and networks in the border regions?
3. Are the indicators of the SOs 1 and 2 realistic and relevant to the planned activities?

The event was organised as workshop with a limited number of participants (up to 15 persons), in order to give enough time for all the participants to express their views during the 90-minute workshop. The selected invitees altogether represented majority of the programme area, they were mostly representatives of the regions and business development organisations, who have an interest towards Estonian – Russian cross-border cooperation.

## Summary of the discussions

In general, the proposed challenges, activities and indicators were assessed positively by the participants. Relevance of none of the proposed challenges and activities was not questioned. Cooperation between the businesses and universities was awaited and cross-border cooperation between entrepreneurs and business support organisation was considered necessary.

In addition, the following points were raised by the participants:

### Thematic comments

- Importance of digitalisation, for SMEs, but also as a horizontal measure, including smart cities that use the new technologies and create platforms for providing services for people.
- Challenges related to rural development in the context of urbanisation (smart cities based on the principles of sustainable development, etc) and decreasing human capital of rural territories.
- Personalisation of all the services as a key word for all the service sectors.
- Importance of the cross-cutting issues of sustainability and green technology.
- Active involvement of export promotion agencies in the planned activities.
- Emerging economic sectors of the future, like consumer cleantech and industries for the sustainable development as the core added value. The ideology of the EU Green Deal and National Technological Initiative Econet in Russia should be borne in mind during programme implementation.
- Questions related to supporting elderly people in society with smart and software solutions.
- The importance of involvement of youngsters and students in cross-border entrepreneurial cooperation.
- Significance of joint tourism business networks, including experience exchange, especially for mono-industrial areas, .
- Emerging cross-border clusters that could accelerate cross-border cooperation and innovations: cleantech and creative industries. In addition, creative industries help to regenerate former industrial sites.
- Possibility to define economic sectors to be targeted more specifically in the programme document – types of industrial production, which are the potential clusters and concrete organizations to carry out cooperation, etc.

### General suggestions

CBC Programmes are the “drivers” for changing the common rules of the game.

The programme must stress the importance of intensify of the cooperation in the projects and the importance of getting things done together. “Why” is the basic question to keep in mind, when preparing cooperation projects.

The programme document could specify, what is the expected added value and real benefit. What are the things that should get better as a result of the projects?

Personal communication and people-to-people contacts are the most important results of projects within the programme. The programme document could highlight their necessity and establish special requirements for relevant activities.

It should not be forgotten that the programme would start within 2 years from now. It is difficult to predict the future and because of that the focus should be on topics and themes that definitely do not disappear.

### **Main conclusions for the programme strategy**

The content of the programme document of the EE-RU CBC Programme should be elaborated further, considering:

- the aspects of circularity, possibly as a horizontal measure;
- the aspects of digitalisation, possibly as a horizontal measure;
- green technologies and creative industries, as possible sectors to be targeted by the programme;
- the need to support tourism entrepreneurship, either as a separate SO or in the frames of SO2 described in the current document;
- the need to support youth entrepreneurship by the programme, possibly in the frames of the Interreg Specific Objective of the programme;