

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

### **DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PROPOSED CHALLENGES AND ACTIVITIES REGARDING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

**Date:** 30 March 2020.

**Format:** online in Zoom environment.

**Participants:** 63 persons (27 from Russia and 36 from Estonia).

#### *1. 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.

Altogether, invitation for the discussion was sent to 113 environmental stakeholders in Estonia and Russia. 63 persons participated (36 from Estonia and 27 from Russia), representing wide range of organisations dealing with environmental issues (representatives of ministries, municipalities, NGOs, regions, regional development organisations, research and educational institutions, etc.) from both sides of the border.

The stakeholders' discussion on 30 March 2021 was based on the discussion paper that was sent to the participants of the meeting together with the invitation approximately 10 days 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 environmental challenges that could be addressed with the help of cross-border cooperation.
3. Draft list of activities that could be supported by the EE-RU CBC programme.

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 environmental experts during the period September 2020 – January 2021.
- Regional and national strategic documents of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Estonia that address environmental issues.

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

1. What is your opinion on the identified challenges? Would you like to bring out additional cross-border challenges?
2. How would you prioritise the proposed challenges?
3. Do you think the proposed activities are realistic and meet the challenges and needs of cross-border area? Are those activities appropriate for strengthening the cooperation links and networks in the border regions?
4. Are there organisations that have interest and capacity to implement proposed activities in the cross-border area?

The event included both, joint sessions and two group work sessions in four break-out rooms in order to give enough time for all the participants to express their views.

## *2. Summary of the discussions*

Before group discussions in the break-out rooms the participants were asked to reply to two questions in the [www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com) environment:

- a) Which challenges are the most relevant for the programme area?
- b) Which challenges require cross-border cooperation?

For answering the first question, the participants could choose 3 out of the 6 challenges proposed in the discussion paper.

Altogether 43 persons answered the question and the ranking based on the number of received “votes” was the following:

1. Lack of joint management of the Narva River basin, including Lake Peipus/Chuskoye and Lake Pskov (25 “votes”).
2. Lack of cooperation in management of protected areas, restoring and protecting habitats (21).
3. Lack of joint management of the Gulf of Finland (19).
4. Increase in the amounts of municipal waste and low re-cycling rates (16).
5. Lack of systematic approach to development of green infrastructure and low-carbon transport (12).
6. Insufficient initiatives in energy efficiency and saving (9).

For answering the second question, the participants could rank the necessity of cross-border cooperation (CBC) in the context of each challenge on a 10-point scale. Zero was the lowest possible = no CBC is necessary for addressing the challenge, and 10 was the highest = CBC is very necessary for addressing the challenge.

Altogether 46 persons answered the question and the ranking based on the average need for cross-border cooperation for each challenge was the following:

1. Lack of joint management of the Narva River basin, including Lake Peipus/Chuskoye and Lake Pskov (average score: 7.6 points).
2. Lack of cooperation in management of protected areas, restoring and protecting habitats (6.4).
3. Increase in the amounts of municipal waste and low re-cycling rates(5.5).
4. Lack of joint management of the Gulf of Finland (5.2).
5. Lack of systematic approach to development of green infrastructure and low-carbon transport (3.9).
6. Insufficient initiatives in energy efficiency and saving (3.6).

## CHALLENGES

The participants were divided into 4 break-out rooms to allow each participant to reflect on the results of the mini survey based on the two Mentimeter questions and complement the challenges proposed by the programming committee.

Discussed topics mostly felt under the proposed challenges.

1. Joint management of the Narva River basin, including Lake Peipus/Chudskoye and Lake Pskov. The challenges are primarily related to eutrophication, sustainable management of the fish stock, wide spectrum of waste and alien invasive species.
2. Joint management of the Gulf of Finland, including the problems related to eutrophication, wide spectrum of waste and alien invasive species.
3. Lacking cooperation regarding management of protected areas, restoring and protecting the habitats.
4. Lack of systematic approach regarding development of green infrastructure and low-carbon public transportation systems.
5. The increasing amounts of municipal waste, low circular material use rates and modest recycling rates of municipal waste.
6. Insufficient initiatives for addressing the issues of energy efficiency and energy saving.

Some specification of challenges were added during the discussion, such as:

- a) Need to promote environmentally friendly farming that avoids excess use of fertilisers and helps to fight eutrophication.
- b) Hazardous substances in the transboundary waters, including pharmaceuticals in the Gulf of Finland.

- c) Management of nature protection areas, including development of nature trails.
- d) Need to increase the amount of comparable environmental data and its exchange, including joint expeditions for scientists on transboundary lakes, development of common methods for monitoring.
- e) Use of remote sensing (satellite methods) for monitoring pollution and making forecasts.
- f) Involvement of volunteers in the environmental protection and monitoring activities.
- g) In the context of circular economy: change the mind-set of the people, popularise secondary usage of the resources and building cooperation with the companies.
- h) Importance of environmental education in tackling environmental problems.
- i) Importance of people-to-people contacts for addressing environmental problems.
- j) Problems with management of the shared fish stock of Lake Peipus/Chudskoye and Lake Pskov, including over-fishing.
- k) Addressing the issues of energy efficiency.
- l) Need to build waste water treatment plants.
- m) Increasing the role of biodiversity in urban natural areas.
- n) Need to map and monitor eco-system services.
- o) Development of cross border cycling infrastructure/carbon neutral logistics.
- p) Increased amounts of lead (Pb) in transboundary waters due to hunting and nets left in the lakes.
- q) Management of reeds on the shores of the transboundary lakes.
- r) Joint protection of species, e.g. ringed seal, European eel.
- s) Counter measures against spreading of alien invasive species, e.g. marbled crayfish, hogweed.

## **ACTIVITIES FOR ADDRESSING THE PROPOSED CHALLENGES**

During the second group work session, when the participants were again divided into 4 breakout rooms, they were asked to highlight the most necessary activities to address the proposed challenges. Especially the challenges that are the most relevant for the cross-border area and require cross-border cooperation.

During the discussions, the participants stressed the importance of the following activities.

### ***Management of the shared waters: the Narva River Basin, including Lake Peipus/Chudskoye and Lake Pskov, and the Gulf of Finland***

- a) Combining the efforts on all levels to deal with eutrophication.
- b) Activities aiming at the decrease the load of nutrients flowing into the water bodies.
- c) Decrease the load of nutrients from agriculture by smarter use of fertilisers. For example, developing a nutrient balance calculator based on common data that takes into account both – the external and internal load (the nutrients already accumulated in the water bodies).
- d) Activities aiming at the decrease of the hazardous substances into the water bodies.

- e) Activities aiming at the decreased amounts of micro and macro waste in the water bodies.
- f) Harmonization of study and research methodologies (methods for sampling, intercalibrated equipment, etc) on Estonian and Russian side in order to collect comparable data.
- g) Involvement of citizens into (voluntary) monitoring actions.
- h) Carrying out common ecosystem modelling.
- i) Mapping and valuing the common ecosystem services and developing the spatial decision support tools for joint environmental management.
- j) Sustainable management of the shared fish stock of the transboundary lakes: establishment of common assessment methodology for setting catch quotas.

### ***Waste water treatment***

- a) Investments into waste water treatment facilities at the settlements and towns by the transboundary Lake Peipus/Chuskoye and Lake Pskov, and by the rivers flowing into the transboundary lakes.
- b) Discuss activity of nutrient recycling (waste-water treatment companies)

### ***Environmental protection***

- a) Joint research and monitoring of birds and mammals, who migrate across Estonian – Russian border. For example, different species of eagles, beavers and seals.
- b) Restoration of habitats, for example the dry basin of the Narva River around Kreenholm island in Narva.
- c) Restoration of wetlands in Estonia and Russia.
- d) Management of protected areas, including networking and experience exchange, management of visitor flows and waste management at the protected areas.

### ***Alien invasive species***

- a) Eradicating alien invasive species, e.g. marbled crayfish, in the Narva River basin, including Lake Peipus/Chudskoye and Lake Pskov by joint mapping, designing of eradication methods and development of eradication measures.
- b) Eradication alien invasive plant species, e.g. hogweed, by joint mapping, designing of eradication methods and development of eradication measures.

### ***Green infrastructure***

- a) Installing counters at the established green infrastructure to know the number of users and make more educated development decisions in future.
- b) Establishment of urban/city gardens combined with awareness raising.

### ***Horizontal measures***

- a) Awareness raising of citizens in connection with environmental problems.
- b) Awareness raising and involvement of politicians: making environmental topics so important that the politicians cannot ignore them.
- c) Exchange of best practices and experiences.
- d) Making more use of scientific tools in addressing the cross-border environmental issues.

### **ORGANISATIONS, WHO HAVE INTEREST AND CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT PROPOSED ACTIVITIES IN THE CROSS-BORDER AREA**

The participants of the seminar proposed both, the organisations, who could be project partners, but also organisations and target groups, who should be involved during implementation of the projects to amplify the impact of the projects.

- a) Ministries and state agencies;
- b) Universities and research institutes;
- c) Local authorities;
- d) Estonian-Russian Joint Commission on the Protection and Sustainable Use of Transboundary Waters;
- e) Administrations of protected areas;
- f) Fishing companies and professional fishermen;
- g) Waste water treatment companies;
- h) Agricultural producers and organisations representing farmers;
- i) Institutions connected with energy sector;
- j) (Environmental) NGOs and associations;
- k) Schools and other educational institutions;
- l) Local citizens.

### **As a conclusion of the event, the content of the programme document of the EE-RU CBC Programme 2021-2027 will be elaborated further, considering:**

- the possibility to focus on fewer environmental challenges than proposed in the discussion paper;
- review the descriptions of the challenges in order to reflect relevant concerns in connection with the chosen challenges;
- review the descriptions of activities in order to reflect adequately the needs proposed by the participants;
- review the lists of target groups.