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IN MY REGION

# ANNUAL EVENT 18.12.2018

## STAKEHOLDER'S KEYNOTE

*Petri Haapalainen, Ministerial Adviser*

*Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the organisers for the invitation to this Annual Event. In my address I shall share some of our experiences on cross-border co-operation between Finnish and Russian border regions.

Traditionally, the border between States has been perceived as an obstacle to development in border regions. Cross-border co-operation, however, has the potential to transform a border into a possibility for development. This is particularly important in the case of the regions on the external borders of the European Union. By working together, these regions can jointly identify and address the specific challenges and opportunities presented by the border between them. It creates "friction" which can offer good business possibilities. Besides the important regional development dimension, this co-operation also has a very strong external policy dimension. Therefore, it constitutes a broad reflection of the goals and activities of different policy processes.

Furthermore, cross-border co-operation has important indirect effects: It fosters people-to-people contacts as well as networks between local communities. Thus, it contributes to the establishment of a common border-region identity. Some of these entities have gradually started to call themselves Euro-regions. Hence, cross-border co-operation facilitates the generation of social capital, trust and mutual understanding among the communities on both sides of the border.

For Finland, Russia is an important neighbor and remains a significant partner in regional cooperation. Bilateral Finnish-Russian Neighborhood Area Cooperation lasted for two decades between the years of 1992-2012. The significance of this cooperation was the establishment of networks, exchange of experiences and information between different actors. Currently, the EU-Russia Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes - or shortly CBC Programmes - bear the main responsibility for continuing this cooperation.

Finland has invested considerable efforts in the CBC Programmes and we consider that it is important to continue developing the border regions. Well-functioning borders promote mobility and grass-root level contacts as well as economic growth. CBC programmes have proven to be a useful tool to reduce the peripherality of the border regions and to promote also multilateral cross-border cooperation.



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Cross-border cooperation offers an excellent forum for numerous stakeholders, such as civil servants, academics and NGOs, to address the topics of joint interest. Stability and sustainable development through strengthened cooperation are in our interests. The border regions have created extensive cooperation networks that can be utilized for regional development.

In the programming period 2007 - 2013 the regions on both sides of the EU external border were for the first time able to participate fully in the programming process. The bottom-up approach of the programme has ensured the full commitment of the regional level. This same approach will continue in the current CBC Programmes 2014 - 2020 implemented between Finland and Russia. Joint allocation of close to 180 million euros from the European Union and participating countries provide possibilities to empower the regions as prosperous and interesting hub and investment target in Northern Europe, to promote their attractiveness and wellbeing of population, and to invest on innovations, research and education for the future generation.

We expect that the CBC Programmes will service as a truly joint financing instrument for cross-border cooperation underlining the importance of regional development. Regions on both sides of the border should also in the future be fully committed and determine the directions of the programmes.

Furthermore, promoting people-to-people contacts and supporting the work of civil society should maintain as one of the key aspects of the instrument.

In the coming years the large investment projects should facilitate smooth border crossings and enhance security at the border.

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Ladies and Gentlemen! I have taken an attempt to present our positive experiences on cross-border co-operation on our eastern border. The governments' responsibility is to create the necessary conditions for enhancing this co-operation. We consider that our duty is to create conducive environment for practical cooperation between the border regions.

I am happy to say that Cross-Border Co-operation has been and will continue to be a key priority for the Finnish Government.

I wish the organisers and participants of the Annual Event all the best in your important work.

Thank you!



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