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It's almost a year since the European Commission adopted the Estonia – Latvia Cross-border Cooperation Programme in December 2007. February 2008 marked the official launch of the Programme in the appropriate setting of Valga-Valka. On that occasion, the mayors of the city and representatives of Estonia, Latvia and the European Commission spoke about the opportunities afforded by the new programme, about the two countries' warm ties and growing cooperation and most importantly about the fact that people are already beginning to think beyond their borders. The event was held just two months after Estonia and Latvia joined "Schengen".

Known in the past as INTERREG, the aim of territorial cooperation programmes of which there are currently over 70 throughout Europe, 50 of which are cross-border, is to bring people together to share ideas and cooperate across borders. There is growing recognition that

these programmes bring enormous benefit to Europe's citizens, facilitating partnerships in a host of areas, from health, culture and the environment to transport, SME's and tourism.

Funds allotted to the Estonia - Latvia Programme may appear small when compared with the "mainstream" programmes in Estonia and Latvia but they should be viewed as a totally different and exciting form of assistance. Total funds for the Estonia - Latvia Programme are 51 million euros with a 75% contribution from the European Regional Development Fund amounting to 38 million. Used wisely on quality projects, the benefits can be enormous.

The Programme's Monitoring Committee, the committee which meets to select projects and monitor implementation has met three times this year in Pärnu, Kuressaare and Haapsalu. Next year it will be the turn of Latvia to host events. Eight projects have been selected to date and we look forward to seeing that number grow in 2009.

The aims of the Programme are threefold: to increase cohesion, promote entrepreneurship and lastly to improve the living environment in rural and deprived areas by promoting grass-root activities.

I hope in particular that we can attract interest in the first priority - "increasing cohesion" which at planning stage was identified as being an important area. What do we mean by this? We are interested in projects which can help reduce the isolation of the border regions through improved internal and external connections. Projects might cover transport, ICT or joint management of public services and resources.

It is important to bear in mind that projects must be genuinely joint Estonian/Latvian projects. The ERDF regional regulations underline that beneficiaries must cooperate in two of the following ways – joint development, joint implementation, joint staffing and joint financing.

We must reach out proactively to ensure that all potential beneficiaries are informed about the opportunities the Programme affords. The newsletter and its target audience have a vital role to play in disseminating information about the Programme and generally supporting all those involved in implementation. I wish the editors every success with this new venture and hope that for the readers it will be a useful source of information.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you a Happy New Year.

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Peeter Unt

Head of the Joint Technical Secretariat of the Estonia – Latvia Programme



“Üks, kaks”, “terviseks” and “Eesti poiss” – this is the average knowledge of Estonian among Latvians. “Saldejums”, “alus” and “iela” – the average knowledge of Latvian among Estonians.

General knowledge about each other is approximately on the same level as that of the language skills, although the number of similarities between these two nations is much larger than people realise. And, of course, instead of real life experience, there are many prejudices about each other.

The Estonia – Latvia Programme has been launched to support interaction between Estonia and Latvia. More specifically – to provide support to such ideas, which are the best to be implemented as joint projects and carried by a will to cooperate.

But more importantly – along with joint project implementation, trust, knowledge and empathy towards the neighbours will increase. And this should lead to contacts, which support long-lasting cooperation between the partners also in the future, and not necessarily depending on joint projects.

The projects should be only the tip of a cooperation iceberg, which Estonia – Latvia Programme brings along. The rest of cooperation, which makes up the hidden and bigger part of the iceberg, has to happen regardless of the programmes and funds.

There is about 30 million EUR left to be granted to good cooperation projects, so think about it and give us a call!

The JTS team wishes everyone happiness and a lot of bright ideas in the new year!



From left: Rasma, Peeter, Lagle, Janika, Helena, Inese and Zanda

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The Programme supports cross-border cooperation projects from the following **Programme area**:

Hiiu, Jõgeva, Lääne, Põlva, Pärnu, Saare, Tartu, Valga, Viljandi and Võru counties in Estonia and Kurzeme, Pierīga, Rīga and Vidzeme regions in Latvia.

The Estonia – Latvia Programme is open to applications not only from the public and non-profit organizations, but also private establishments.

Projecs should promote sustainable development and economic competitiveness of the Programme area and fall under three priority axes of the Programme that cover several directions of support:

Priority 1. Increased cohesion of the Programme area

- 1.1. Reducing isolation through improved internal and external connectivity of the Programme area
- 1.2. Enhancing joint management of public services and resources

Priority 2. Higher competitiveness of the Programme area

- 2.1. Facilitating business start-up and development
- 2.2. Increasing the attractiveness of the Programme area
- 2.3. Enhancing employable skills and human resources

Priority 3. Active, sustainable and integrated communities

- 3.1. Improving the environment for active and sustainable communities
- 3.2. Promoting grass-root level actions



The Programme differs from other similar programmes with its continuous application procedure. This procedure has been established to provide more support to the applicants during the project development and give a chance to improve the projects also after their submission. Final selection of projects is done by the Monitoring Committee (MC) that usually meets 3 times per year. MC consists of the of national, regional, or local level, and socio-economic partners.



Project application cycle



Estonia - Latvia Programme: *From early start until today...*

The attempts to strengthen the regional cooperation between the countries were started already during implementation of the Estonia-Latvia-Russia INTERREG IIIA Priority within the Baltic Sea Region INTERREG III B Neighbourhood Programme. The Estonia – Latvia Programme 2007-2013 carries on those efforts and aims at further developing the ties between Estonia and Latvia. The Programme is funded by European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Republic of Estonia and the Republic of Latvia.

The Programme was planned and developed in cooperation among the local and regional authorities and socio-economic partners, considering the needs and cooperation opportunities within the region and with the help of regional round-tables and public hearings in 2006 and 2007.

Estonia – Latvia Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 was officially launched on February 28, 2008, with an **opening conference in Valga, Estonia**. This event focused on cooperation between Estonia and Latvia, and also served as the first partner search activity, bringing together more than 200 public, private and non-profit representatives of both countries.

Since opening, various important developments have taken place in the Programme, and today the first projects have already started to strengthen and promote the cross-border cooperation between the two countries.

Back in March and April of 2008, 18 **information seminars** were held in various eligible regions of Latvia and Estonia to introduce the Programme to the potential applicants. A highly attended seminar followed in Riga on July 3, 2008. The Programme has also been presented through a number of external events and meetings with local stake-holders. There have been over 100 **consultations** held by the JTS in 2008.

A fruitful cooperation has been developed also with other cross-border cooperation programmes, especially in addressing the less informed target groups.

Since a large part of the potential applicants have a rather vague idea about the European Territorial Cooperation programmes and their difference from other mainstream funding instruments, the joint efforts have turned out to be very helpful in explaining the focus on cross-border cooperation and general expectations from the projects.

The **Joint Technical Secretariat** of the Programme has been located in Tartu, and it is hosted by Enterprise Estonia.

In March 2008, JTS moved to its new premises in Sõbra 56, where the potential applicants have been actively consulted. In order to provide local support for the potential applicants, the Programme has also established an **Information Point in Riga**, which operates as a part of the JTS. The Information Point was opened on June 4, 2008, together with the official opening of the EU Territorial Cooperation Programmes' Office in Riga.

The JTS currently works as a team of 7 people: head of the Secretariat, Peeter Unt, Programme consultants Inese Dauškane, Janika Friedenthal, Zanda Gailume, and Helena Järviste, and a part time office assistant Lagle-Katrin Lambavere, who all work at the Tartu office, and Programme information manager, Rasma Rozenberga, who is based in the Information Point in Riga.



JTS staff painting their new office in Tartu

Director of the State Regional Development Agency, Anna Vītola-Helviga and the Chairman of the Board of the Enterprise Estonia, Üleri Alamets signing the hosting agreement for the Information Point in Rīga.



During the last year, the Estonia – Latvia Programme has had 3 **Monitoring Committee meetings**, financing decisions were taken in June and September 2008.

Graphic: Funding committed per Programme and per each priority

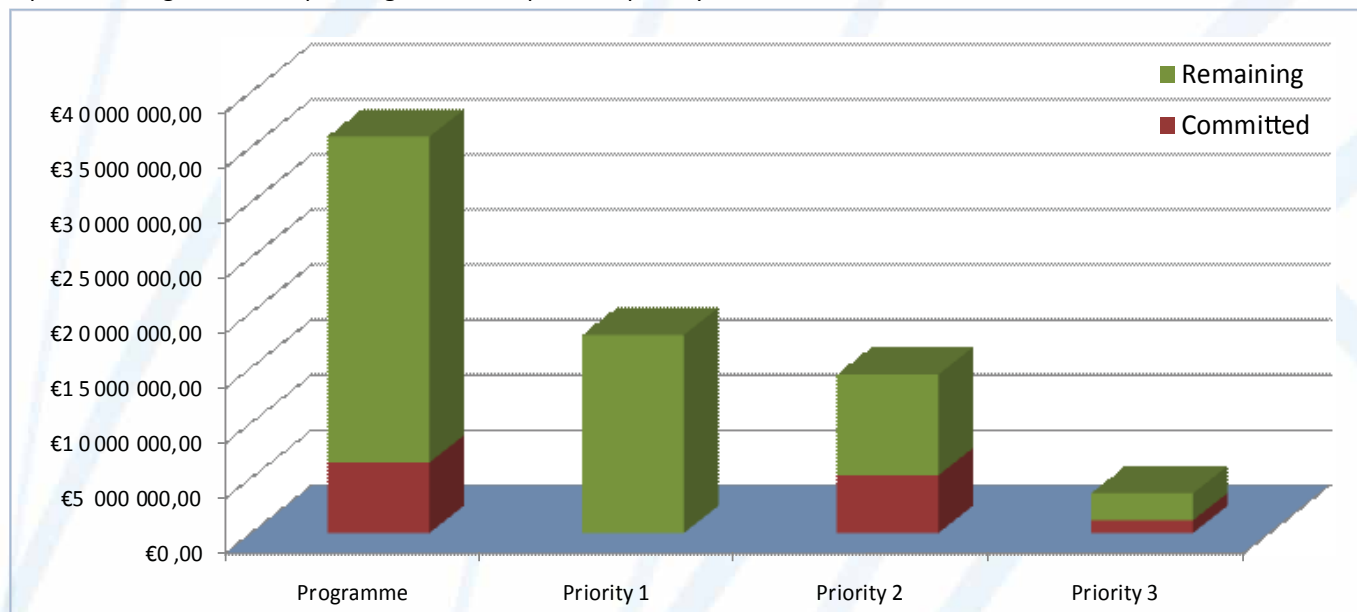


Table of figures: Commitments (in EUR) and indicator fulfilment (%) after first financing decisions in June and September 2008

	Target	Committed	Remaining	Fulfilment	
Programme	35 934 836	6 381 258	29 553 578	18%	8 projects approved
Priority 1: Increased Cohesion of the Programme area	17 967 418	0	17 967 418	0%	No projects approved
Priority 2: Higher competitiveness of the Programme area	14 373 934	5 231 606	9 142 328	36%	4 projects approved
Priority 3: Active, sustainable and integrated communities	3 593 484	1 149 652	2 443 832	32%	4 projects approved

The Programme has also held various strategically important meetings for the other institutions of the Programme - for example, in order to ensure effective cooperation and smooth running of the Programme, the First-level Control institutions of both countries met and discussed the common issues in Tartu in May and October 2008.

In October 2008, partners of the first approved projects were brought together for special seminars in Latvia and Estonia. These **partner seminars** focused on the project implementation and explained the Programme requirements for reporting, publicity and other important aspects. This was an opportunity for the project partners to meet and discuss issues with JTS and First-level Control representatives, as well as establish contacts with each other.



Aluksne - Haanja Uplands (AHU)

Local governments of Alūksne and Haanja are strengthening the ties between Latvians and Estonians through the winter sport activities. Both places have traditionally become the centres for the winter sports thanks to the climate specifics in this border region. The project is helping to further develop the skiing and biathlon traditions. Through joint efforts, the sport and training facilities are getting improved, meanwhile promoting the overall idea of healthy lifestyle in both communities. Winter camp for young sports fans, training course for beginner skiers and People's Ski Run are organized to activate community and promote vital and healthy lifestyle. On the level of professional sports, project involves a camp for young biathletes, Study Day for biathlon referees and International Biathlon Competition. Cooperation through personal contacts and sharing of skills (among the athletes and instructors) is combined with enhancement of material and technical standards of the sports centres.

Lead partner – Haanja Rural Municipality

Partners – Aluksne District Council

Priority 3. Active sustainable and integrated communities

3.1 Improving the environment for active and sustainable communities

ERDF funding – 287 385,00 EUR

Beach Hopping

The project is implemented by 7 coastal municipalities situated around the Gulf of Riga in the Baltic Sea – Saulkrasti (the Lead Partner), Salacgrīva, Liepupe, Jūrmala, Carnikava in Latvia and Häädemeeste and Audru municipalities in Estonia. The project aims to improve the overall attractiveness, environment and safety of the beaches along the coast of the Gulf of Rīga by (1) raising the standards of the beaches in partner municipalities using Blue Flag as a benchmark, focusing on lifeguarding and beach safety; (2) increasing the awareness of visitors about the partner municipalities as attractive tourism destinations. The project will benefit the local communities (particularly children and young people in terms of beach safety) tourists and visitors, and consequently also the local businesses.

Lead partner – Saulkrasti Town Council

Partners – The Municipality of Audru, Carnikava Municipality, Municipality of Häädemeeste, Jūrmala City Council, Liepupe Municipal Council, Salacgrīva Town Council

Priority 2. Higher competitiveness of the Programme area

2.2 Increasing the attractiveness for visitors

ERDF funding – 1 626 890,65 EUR

First approved projects in the Estonia – Latvia Programme



Connecting Stende and Võhma¹

Stende and Võhma have been Twinning Towns since 2001, and the project will help to strengthen their cooperation through thoroughly planned cultural exchange activities. These activities will also serve the important purpose to make the local communities of Stende and Võhma more attractive places to live, work and visit. Cultural exchanges will include series of workshops for local folk artists (singers, dancers and craftsmen), as well as specially organized Latvian Days in Võhma and Estonian Days in Stende, introducing the local inhabitants and visitors to the culture of the neighbouring country.

Lead partner – Stende Town Council (Latvia)

Partner – Võhma Town Council (Estonia)

Priority 3. Active sustainable and integrated communities

3.1 Improving the environment for active and sustainable communities

ERDF funding – 275 665,20 EUR

Cultural Cooperation for Intermediates

Haanja, Rõuge, Veclaicene, Märkalne and Ziemei municipalities are carrying out a range of cultural activities to promote permanent ties and cultural exchanges between the Estonian and Latvian communities in their cross-border region. Each of the participating municipalities is organizing 5 cultural events with local performing artists, as well sharing experience in exchange seminars on common issues and problems in the field of cultural life and development in remote areas. As part of the project, cultural centres will be improved and enabled to host more cross-cultural events and programs in future.

Lead partner – Veclaicene Municipality

Partners – Rõuge Municipality, Haanja Municipality, Märkalne Municipality, Ziemei Municipality

Priority 3. Active sustainable and integrated communities

3.2 Promoting grass-root level actions

ERDF funding – 291 975,00 EUR

¹ Fulfillment of conditions is still pending approval by the Monitoring Committee

Increasing the attractiveness of Valga-Valka

The project is implemented by the twin-towns of Valga and Valka and aims at increasing attractiveness and providing larger choice of public services for tourists and businesses, as well as the local Latvian and Estonian communities.

Improved public areas along the Pedele River and variety of cultural and recreational services will be among the benefits of this project, along with technical projects for larger future objects like Valga-Valka Visitor's Centre, Ice Hall and military bunkers (to be eventually reconstructed as a tourism object).

Lead partner – Valga Town Government

Partners – Valka Town Council

Priority 2. Higher competitiveness of the Programme area

2.2 Increasing the attractiveness for visitors

ERDF funding – 1 970 464,90 EUR

Sportborder

Local governments of Ape and Rõuge and Sports Society Skystar are working together on a project improving the accessibility and infrastructure of sports and recreational services for the rural communities on both sides of the border. Ice rinks and other joint facilities are provided to the local Latvian and Estonian communities to bring them closer and develop further cooperation. Project also includes various thematic sports events and trainings that involve schools, local authorities, sport societies, clubs and sport managers from both sides of the border.

Lead partner – Ape Town with rural area council

Partners – Rõuge Municipality Government, Sports Society Skystar NGO

Priority 3. Active sustainable and integrated communities

3.1 Improving the environment for active and sustainable communities

ERDF funding – 285 600,00 EUR



Protolab Network

The project aims at creating a strong cross-border integrated Network of Protolabs - Product Development, Training and Testing Centres. These centres support development of relevant industries, helping to shift their focus from the traditional routes to more high tech and higher value added sectors for the benefit of the local entrepreneurs.

The partnership and the strong need for this kind of network arise from the common interests, yet distinctive strengths of the partners. The institutional and regional industry profiles are similar to some extent (metal and machinery industry, electronics industry), however, each organization has a clear advantage ground in terms of specific mechatronics-related key sectors that are more advanced in their regions. Thus engaging in mutual knowledge transfer and strategic cooperation will significantly foster development of mechatronics-related industries in the region.

Lead partner – Tartu Science Park (Estonia)

Partners – Ogre Business and Innovation Incubator (Latvia), Ventspils University College (Latvia)

Priority 2. Higher competitiveness of the Programme area

2.1 Facilitating business start-up and development

ERDF funding – 913 750, 00 EUR

GoodFruit

Estonian University of Life Sciences, Püre Horticultural Research Center, Association Partnership of Kandava, farms "Rūkšīši" and „Lāses”, and Berry Farming LLC are sharing their efforts and knowledge to raise the general competitiveness of the local fruit and berry businesses that form an important agricultural industry in both countries. The project will set up and develop Estonian-Latvian Fruit and Berry Product Development Competence Centre to address the common problem – failure of local fruit and berry producers to ensure accessibility and competitiveness of their production in the market due to obsolete technologies of storage and processing.

Benefits of the project will be novel storage methodologies, upgraded infrastructure and know-how for product development for both Estonian and Latvian companies, especially SMEs, as well as a strong cross-border network of Estonian and Latvian leading sectoral research centres.

Lead partner – Estonian University of Life Sciences

Partners – Püre Horticultural Research Center, Association Partnership of Kandava, Farm Rukisi, Farm Lases, Berry Farming LLC

Priority 2. Higher competitiveness of the Programme area

2.1 Facilitating business start-up and development

ERDF funding – 720 500,00 EUR

How to get the good fruit?

Even though picking strawberries in the snow remains a fairytale, it is very realistic to have our own local fruit and berries also in winter season. But that needs improved fruit and berry storage and processing technologies.

This is what the project “GoodFruit” generally aims at. Approved in the last summer, it is now working hard to enhance regional business activity and increase competitiveness of Estonian and Latvian food industries, based on new and improved local fruit and berry product development. The project involves series of investments in storage and processing technologies, organisation of study trips and seminars and promotion of cooperation networks.

The project involves 6 partners: Estonian University of Life Sciences (Polli Horticultural Research Centre, Estonia); Pure Horticultural Research Centre (Latvia); non-profit associations Kandavas Partnerība (Latvia) and Berry Farming OÜ (Estonia); companies Rūķiši Farm and Lāses.



Jānis Lepsis, head of the board, Püre Horticultural Research Center

How did you come to your project idea and decide to cooperate with Estonians?

We know the researchers from the Polli Horticultural Institute for many years already. Püre Horticultural Research Center has previously taken part in INTERREG IIIA project BALTHORT together with Lithuanian partners, and we have later discussed this cooperation and its results also with Polli colleagues and agreed it would be a good idea to cooperate in a similar way. This new Project idea came from the Estonian side.

What is the general situation with fruit and berry production and storage in Latvia and Estonia? Where do our neighbours have more experience and what are our strengths?

The situation in fruit and berry production is similar in both countries. Latvia has more land for this kind of production, but we both face the same problems with storage, with selling of our production, also utilizing of the non-standard production. Polli institute introduced new technologies in 2007 to apply ULO (ultra low oxygen) technologies in fruit and berry storage. This is widely used technology in Europe and rest of the world, but we do not have data on its application for all the locally specific types of fruit and berry. As Püre has got more research experience, we are planning a joint research. In frames of this project, Püre Horticultural Research Center is investing in similar technologies, so within the next years we will be able to provide the local producers with the results they are interested in. Another component of this Project is processing, and this mostly involves Estonians and another Latvian partner.

What will be the actual benefit for the local producers? And will we be able to get our own fruit and berries in the supermarkets in future?

First, the involved producers will get new important contacts and know-how. Of course, the co-financing for introduction of new technologies is important. For other producers the Project will provide opportunities to participate in experience exchange trips, market facilitating events, learning about the new technologies and analyzing how those fit their needs. Improvement of the processing is very important, especially in years like the last one, when only a few companies are interested in apples for processing. The project does not intend to directly increase the proportion of the local goods in the supermarkets right away, but it will definitely contribute to that indirectly by stimulating cooperation between the producers.

Lack of storage facilities, diverse processing, product development and distribution channels is considered to be a substantial obstacle to the production of locally grown horticultural products in Estonia and Latvia. Therefore, gradually more attention is paid to improvement of storage conditions and processing of locally-grown horticultural products in order to enhance their production and competitiveness. During the project period, four seminars will be organised introducing both theoretical and practical applications of advanced storage and processing technologies. The first seminar entitled “Fruit storage in Estonia and Latvia. Situation and prospective. Controlled atmosphere storage technology” was held in July at Polli Horticultural Research Centre and another seminar “Processing in Latvia and Estonia” was held in September in Püre, Latvia. Both seminars were combined with field trips.

Storage time and quality of horticultural products can be significantly improved by preserving them in the controlled atmosphere, where the respiratory rate of stored fruits is inhibited, thus extending its storage life. For successful introduction of such technology, it is necessary to test local fruit and berry cultivars in regional horticultural research centres to determine the cultivars best preserved when using this technology.

Another significant obstacle to business development is found to be in the lack of knowledge in fruit and berry processing and product development. Fruit and berry processing and product development cannot be enhanced by theoretical consultations and training alone. Project objective is to establish the pilot centre for processing and development of horticultural products, which would allow introduction of research results into business. First stage of this has been completed with reconstruction of the pilot centre at Polli Horticultural Research Centre.

Project activities put great emphasis on marketing and promotion activities. In the framework of the project, the partners will organize themselves or participate in trade fairs in order to encourage fruit and berry growers to distribute their production. First public event was held in Püre, Latvia in September, where fruit growers and processors of both countries were presenting a range of their products.

The best wishes to the partners of the „GoodFruit” project and we all hope it will bring good results for fruit and berry producers, as well as consumers!



Picture 1: Field trip in Estonia with Latvian partners. Visit of the fruit and berry processors in Estonia.



Picture 2: Seminar on July 24, 2008. Fruit storage in Estonia and Latvia. Situation and perspectives. Controlled atmosphere storage technology.



Picture 3: Refurbished facilities at the future pilot centre for processing and development of horticultural products at Polli Horticultural Research Centre.

Programme news and developments

Next Monitoring Committee meeting will be held in Liepāja, Latvia on February 19-20, 2009.

Next information seminars in Latvia and Estonia will be held in late winter/ early spring. Please check our web site for precise dates and more detailed information.

Consultation days in regions - if you have several project ideas in your area for the Estonia – Latvia Programme and would like to receive a joint consultation, it is possible to arrange it at your place. Please contact JTS.

Consultations are available in Tartu and Programme's Information Point in Riga, and we recommend all project applicants to use this opportunity to discuss their project ideas and the unclear questions before submitting the application. Please contact JTS in advance to make arrangements. We also ask you to send us a filled project idea form (can be downloaded at the Programme's website) and the main questions before you come to the consultation, so that we can use the consultation time more productively.

The Programme Manual and application form are currently being updated. The new versions of both documents will soon be uploaded on Programme's web page. Please check for the latest version when preparing your application.

- The latest Manual changes will be listed at the beginning of the document. If you have been using the previous version, please read through this list to avoid missing some relevant information (and download the new version for future use).
- The application form will be changed and provided with some more detailed instructions for the applicants. This is for the purpose to make the form user friendlier and also more helpful for project assessment.

Reporting guidelines are available online

- The Estonian Reporting Guidelines are now available at: www.siseministeerium.ee/36523.
- Please find the uploaded Latvian Reporting Guidelines at: www.vraa.gov.lv/interreg_1_limene_fin_kontrole/latvijas_igaunijas_programma/
Please note that due to new legislation, there have been recent changes (related to overtime pay and other aspects), so please follow this latest document.

In other programmes...

The 2nd and 3rd call of the **Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme 2007-2013** are foreseen to take place March 9 to April 15 and September 15 to October 15, 2009. The Programme offers support from the European Regional Development Fund for cross-border cooperation projects in Latvia, Estonia, Finland (and Åland) and/ or Sweden. The Joint Technical Secretariat welcomes all project developers to consultations on project ideas and offers help in applying for the funding.

The **Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013** has announced its 2nd call: 19 January – 31 March 2009. Individual consultations are currently provided in Riga and Rostock, please feel free to make an appointment through info@eu.baltic.net. The Programme will also have its next Lead Applicant seminars 4-5 February 2009, Rostock, Germany.

For more news from other EU Territorial Cooperation programmes 2007-2013, check the websites:

Latvia – Lithuania Programme:
<http://www.latlit.eu/>

Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme:
www.centralbaltic.eu

Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013:
<http://eu.baltic.net/>

Did you know...

The last year marked the 90th anniversary for both Estonia and Latvia. This important fact was marked by series of special events and celebrations in both countries.



3845 people participated in a special relay "Run! For Latvia!" in Riga on October 18. Beside the attempt for Guinness World record, the event brought a lot of fun for all participants. Many ran their parts with families and baby strollers. Some amused the audience with special outfits, singing or running backwards.

On May 3, more than 50 000 volunteers and hundreds of organizations engaged in a citizen-initiated clean-up campaign „Let's Do It!" all over the country in Estonia. The campaign managed to collect more than 10,000 tons of rubbish. The idea was later taken over by Latvians. (Photo: Siim Männik)



Special activity „Bridges of Light" took place all over Latvia, commemorating August 23 and the Baltic Way that took place 19 years ago. This was a symbolic unity shown by lightening candles on all the bridges.

The 90th anniversary was marked by all kinds of social and cultural events across the country, as well as overseas (photo from Estonian society in Vancouver).

