

**EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD INSTRUMENT  
CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME  
LATVIA-LITHUANIA-BELARUS  
2014-2020**

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## 1. PROGRAMME PREPARATION STEPS

The programming of the 2014-2020 European Neighbourhood Instrument CBC Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus Programme (*hereinafter - the Programme*) started in the year 2013. For this task the Programming Task Force (*hereinafter - the PTF*) was established consisting of representatives from national and regional authorities of Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus. The Rules of Procedure of the PTF were approved in its 1<sup>st</sup> meeting that took place in Druskininkai, Lithuania on 22 February 2013.

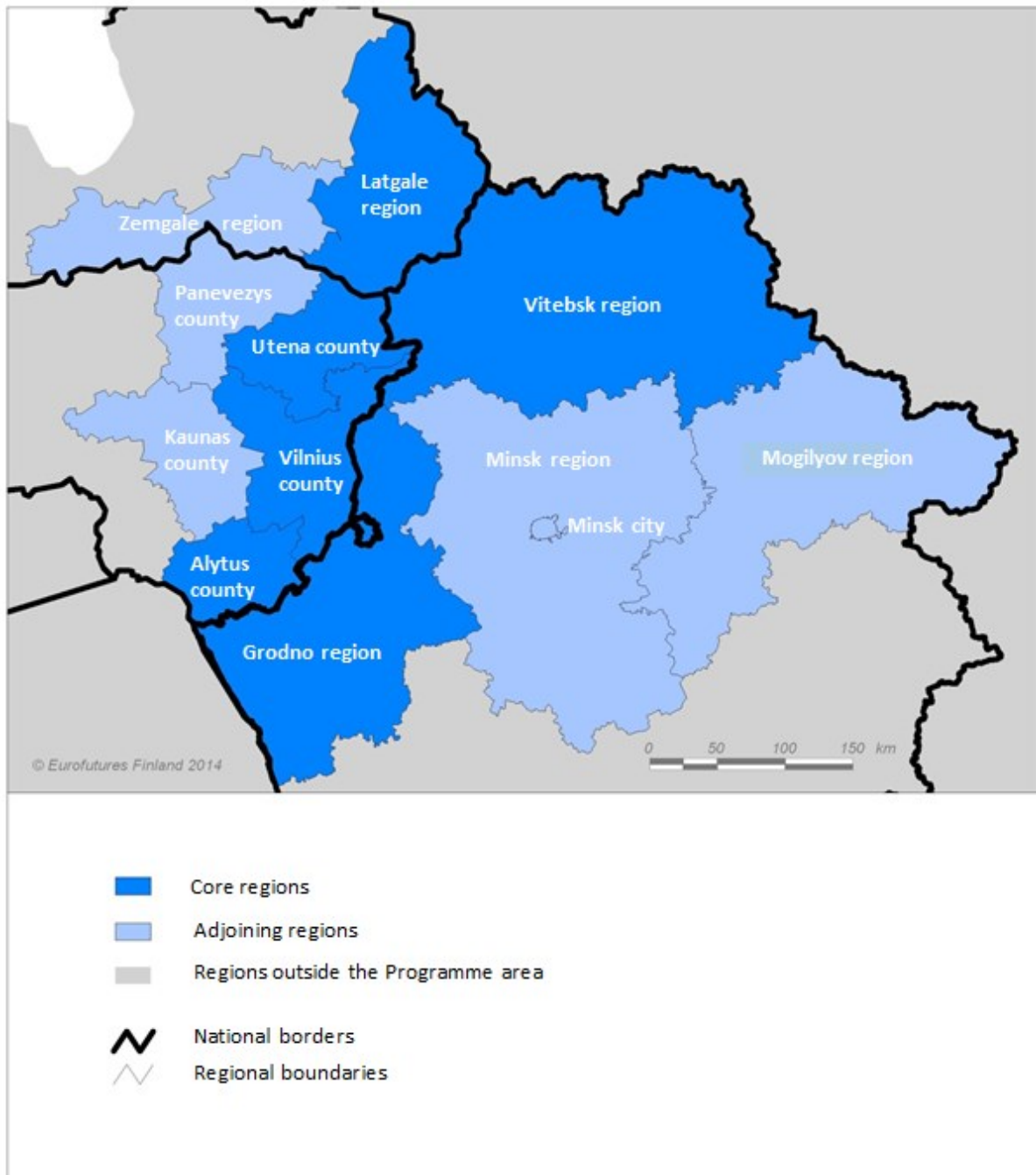
In order to develop the Programme, the total of 9 PTF meetings were organised in Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus. During these meetings discussions regarding territory, socio-economic context, priorities and measures, strategic projects, as well as management and control system of the Programme were held, and respective decisions were taken. Also, procedures of strategic environment assessment (SEA) and public consultations were approved during PTF meetings. In its 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, the PTF approved the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania as the Programme's Managing Authority and the Public Establishment Joint Technical Secretariat as the Programme's Joint Technical Secretariat. In addition, wide public consultation was carried out in Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus from April till June, 2015, including thematic consultations with ministries dealing with objectives chosen by the Programme. In Latvia public hearing was organized on 12 May 2015, in Belarus it was held in June 2015. They provided opportunity for different stakeholders to comment on the draft of the Programme and SEA report. As a result, the draft of the Programme document was amended and approved by the PTF on 8 June 2015. The Programme document was submitted for the approval of the European Commission by end of June 2015.

The following EU legal acts have been taken into account during preparation of the Programme: the Regulation (EU) No 236/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 laying down common rules and procedures for the implementation of the Union's instruments for financing external action; Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument; Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 897/2014 of 18 August 2014 laying down specific provisions for the implementation of cross-border cooperation programmes financed under Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument; the Programming document for European Union support to ENI cross-border cooperation for the period 2014-2020, that provides the strategic framework for EU support for cross-border cooperation on the external borders of the EU, under the ENI, for the period 2014-2020. Moreover, Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002; Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1268/2012 of 29 October 2012 on the rules of application of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union were taken into consideration.

The Programme is co-financed by the European Union (*hereinafter - the EU*) under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (*hereinafter - the ENI*).

## 2. PROGRAMME AREA

### 2.1. Territory



*Figure 1. The Programme area*

The Programme area (with adjoining regions) covers a territory of 198,221 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 25,289 km<sup>2</sup> are located in the territory of Latvia, 38,327 km<sup>2</sup> in Lithuania and 134,605 km<sup>2</sup> in



Belarus. 78,163 km<sup>2</sup> (39.43%) of the territory are situated inside and 134,605 km<sup>2</sup> (60.57%) outside of the European Union<sup>1</sup>. The whole Programme area lies within the Baltic Sea Region. The length of the external EU border addressed by the Programme is 835.3 km (170.6 km of Latvia-Belarus border and 664.7 km of Lithuania-Belarus border).

The eligible area of the Programme includes 12 territorial units of the three following countries - Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus. These include 2 regions in Latvia - Latgale and Zemgale, 5 counties in Lithuania - Utena, Vilnius, Alytus, Panevezys and Kaunas, and 5 regions in Belarus - Grodno (*be. Hrodna*), Vitebsk (*be. Vitsebsk*), Minsk, Mogilyov (*be. Mahiliou*) and the capital city of Belarus - Minsk. Belarusian territorial units constitute the largest share of the eligible area of the Programme.

In addition, even though Riga, the capital of Latvia, is not included in the Programme territory, LIPs foreseen under *Priority 4.1 "Enhancing border-crossing efficiency"* encompass beneficiaries that are based in this city (i. e. Latvia's State Customs Committee, State Stock Companies "State Real Estate" and "Latvian State Roads"). However, inclusion of Riga is deemed an exception, since in this case location of beneficiaries does not represent the target territory. Actions of these LIPs in question will be targeted at improving border-crossing facilities lying at the borders of the participating countries.

All territorial units of this Programme, except for Zemgale region, are the same as those addressed by the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ENPI CBC 2007-2013 programme. Thus, their inclusion is justifiable by the aim to continue cooperation among these regions in the period of 2014-2020. In addition, Zemgale region (Latvia) has been included among the adjacent regions of the Programme area, since particular comparable advantages of the latter might be exploited for the benefit of the Programme area.

First of all, Zemgale region has various industries with comparative advantages in agriculture, well-developed infrastructure and flexible labour market. Secondly, this region has a good access to educational, scientific and entrepreneurship support institutions, necessary for the development of the region's potential. Furthermore, more than half of Zemgale's population lives in rural areas, therefore, the region has well developed systems for promotion of traditional skills. Finally, there are numerous cultural and historical heritage objects of international importance beneficial for development of tourism in the region.

Even though Zemgale region has no direct border with Belarus, it has concluded some important commonwealth agreements with Belarusian regions located in the Programme area (Jelgava (Latvia)-Baranovichi (*be. Baranavichy*) and Molodechno (*be. Maladzyechna*) (Belarus), Jēkabpils (Latvia) - Lida and Grodno (Belarus)). Among the main cooperation fields in the above-mentioned agreements are those targeted by this Programme (namely culture, education, tourism, health and sport).

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<sup>1</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>), National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>).

*Table 1. The eligible area of the Programme*

Core regions	Adjoining regions
Latgale Region (Latvia)	Zemgale Region (Latvia)
Utena County (Lithuania)	Kaunas County (Lithuania)
Vilnius County (Lithuania)	Panevezys County (Lithuania)
Alytus County (Lithuania)	Minsk Region (Belarus)
Grodno Region (Belarus)	Mogilyov Region (Belarus)
Vitebsk Region (Belarus)	Minsk City (Belarus)

## 2.2. Population

According to the urban-rural typology of NUTS 3 regions developed by the Eurostat, the majority of territorial units included in the Programme are predominantly rural, meaning that over 50 per cent of the total population lives in the rural areas. These include Latgale and Zemgale regions in Latvia, Minsk region in Belarus, and Utena, Alytus, Panevezys counties in Lithuania. The other 4 of the territorial units are intermediate with the share of rural population of 20 to 50 per cent. These include Kaunas county in Lithuania, as well as Vitebsk, Grodno, Mogilyov regions in Belarus. Only two territorial units are predominantly urban, namely those containing the capitals of Lithuania and Belarus, Vilnius county and Minsk city, respectively<sup>2</sup>.

The largest share of the Programme area is inhabited by the Belarusian population. Out of around 9 million inhabitants of the Programme territory 6.6 million live in Belarus, 1.9 million in Lithuania and 0.5 million in Latvia. The geographical conditions of the Programme area (lots of woodlands and numerous lakes) influence the settlement structure, which is characterized by low population density in most of the region. An average population density (excluding exceptionally densely populated Minsk city) is 33 persons per km<sup>2</sup>, which is way below the EU average (114 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>)<sup>3</sup>.

## 2.3. Historical and Cultural Background

The countries involved in the Programme not only share borders but also have common history, as well as cultural and historical heritage.

At different times these countries belonged to the same political units. From the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Lithuanian and Belarusian lands were part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania,

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat ([http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Urban-rural\\_typology](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Urban-rural_typology)).

<sup>3</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>), National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>).

while from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century both were included in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Modern day Lithuania's, Latvia's and Belarus' territories were incorporated into the Russian Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and afterwards for more than half of the century belonged to the Soviet Union. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century all of the participating countries gained independence.

Due to unique historical past, regions of the Programme are inhabited by relatively large ethnic minority populations. According to the data of 2014, in Latgale region Russians constituted 38 per cent, Poles - 7 per cent, Belarusians - 5 per cent, Lithuanians - 1 per cent, while in Zemgale region Russians made up 17 per cent, Belarusians - 4 per cent, Lithuanians - 3 per cent, Poles - 2 per cent of the total population<sup>4</sup>. According to the census of 2011, on the Lithuanian side of the Programme area 10 per cent of the total population consisted of Poles, 7 per cent - of Russians, 2 per cent - of Belarusians<sup>5</sup>. According to the Belarusian census of 2009, in Grodno region 20 per cent of the total population consisted of Poles, 12 per cent - of Russians. Russians made up 10 per cent of the population in both Vitebsk region and Minsk city, 8 per cent - in Mogilyov region, 7 per cent in Minsk region<sup>6</sup>.

The Programme area is rich in both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. In Latgale region there are plenty of architectural monuments - cathedrals, churches, urban ensembles, as well as rural farmsteads, typical settlements and cultural landscapes. Cultural traditions of Latgale, including language, folk songs, dances, craftsmanship, form a significant part of national culture of Latvia<sup>7</sup>. Zemgale region contains a few of the most outstanding architectural objects in Latvia, namely Rundale and Jelgava palaces. The latter are very popular country's tourist attractions<sup>8</sup>.

Cultural and historical heritage sites are also abundant in Vilnius county, among others. Kernavė Archaeological Site, which is included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, presents an exceptional testimony to the evolution of human settlements in the Baltic region over the lengthy period. Another UNESCO World Heritage Site, Vilnius Historic Centre, has preserved an impressive complex of Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and classical buildings as well as its medieval layout and natural setting. Utena and Panevezys counties have long brewery, bread baking traditions, as well as numerous manor houses, while Alytus can boast of both rich culture and outstanding nature<sup>9</sup>.

An outstanding 16<sup>th</sup> century fortification of Mir Castle in Grodno region, as well as the national historical and cultural museum-reserve "Nesvizh" in the Architectural, Residential and Cultural Complex of the Radziwills in Minsk region are important landmarks of Belarus. Both of them are included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, as well. Vitebsk is

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<sup>4</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>).

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>).

<sup>6</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>).

<sup>7</sup> Official website of Latgale Region (<http://www.latgale.lv/>).

<sup>8</sup> Latvia Travel website (<http://www.latvia.travel/en/article/southern-latvia-zemgale>).

<sup>9</sup> Lithuanian tourism websites (e. g. <http://www.visitlithuania.net/>, <http://www.lithuania.travel/>, etc.).

often referred to as the cultural capital of Belarus, while Mogilyov is rich in heritage sites dating back to 17th and 18th centuries<sup>10</sup>.

In addition, another UNESCO World Heritage Site, Struve Geodetic Arc, is a chain of survey triangulations representing a remarkable 19<sup>th</sup> century endeavour to determine the size and shape of the Earth, and encompasses all three countries of the Programme<sup>11</sup>. Intangible cultural heritage of the Programme area includes Baltic song and dance celebrations in Latvia and Lithuania, Lithuanian multipart songs, cross-crafting and its symbolisms, as well as Belarusian rite of the Kolyady (Christmas) Tsars<sup>12</sup>.

## 2.4. Demographic and Social Challenges

One of the most pressing issues visible in the Programme area in recent decades is population decline. During the period of 2005-2010 decline in the number of inhabitants in Belarusian part of the Programme area was smaller than that in Latvian and Lithuanian parts, where the total population shrank by around 0.23 and 0.3 million people, respectively. The largest population decline was recorded in the predominantly rural areas of the Programme (Utena and Alytus counties, as well as Latgale and Zemgale regions), while in urban and intermediate areas, especially those locating the biggest cities (Vilnius and Kaunas counties), the shrinkage was smaller. During the analysed period population has been growing only in Minsk city.

Low birth rate and negative net migration, both of which lead to population decline, also increase the proportion of older (especially, those of pre-retirement age) people within the total population. According to the census of 2011, people of pre-retirement age (55-64 years old) comprised over 12 per cent in Latvia and over 11 per cent in Lithuania. It should be taken into account that the retirement age in Belarus, compared to other countries of the Programme, is significantly lower. In particular, it is 55 years for women and 60 years for men, while in Lithuania - 61 and 63, respectively, and in Latvia - over 62 years for both genders. Therefore, in the case of Belarus, pre-retirement age is better reflected by the age group of 50-59 years. In 2013, population of this age comprised over 15 per cent of total population in Belarus.

Life expectancy, representing general life conditions, is several years shorter in the Programme area than in the neighbouring urban regions and even more challenging with regard to the EU average. In 2011 in Belarusian part of the Programme area (except for Minsk city) life expectancy was on average lower than 70 years, while in Lithuania and Latvia it was equal to around 74 years, in comparison with the EU average of more than 80 years. Life expectancy is related to the level of social inclusion. In the period of 2008-2011 share of population at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Latvia and Lithuania had been increasing, exceeding the EU average. In 2012 the value of this indicator decreased, although

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<sup>10</sup> Official website of the Republic of Belarus (<http://www.belarus.by/>).

<sup>11</sup> Vilnius tourism website (<http://www.vilnius-tourism.lt/>).

<sup>12</sup> Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania (<http://www.kpd.lt/en/main-menu/heritage-in-lithuania/world-heritage-objects-in-lithuania.html>)

it was still higher than the EU average. In the years 2008-2011 the largest share of people with an income below minimum subsistence level in Belarus was in Vitebsk and Mogilyov regions, while the lowest was in Minsk city<sup>13</sup>.

## 2.5. Employment

In 2012, the officially registered unemployment level in Belarus was equal to 0.5 per cent. The lowest unemployment level was in Minsk city (0.2 per cent), while in Minsk region it was also below the country's average (0.4 per cent). In the other regions of Belarus, namely Vitebsk, Grodno and Mogilyov, unemployment levels exceeded average but were similar to it. In the same year, unemployment levels in both Latvian regions of the Programme area exceeded both the country's average (15.2 per cent) and the EU-27 average (10.5 per cent) and were equal to 17.6 per cent in Zemgale and 20.8 per cent in Latgale. In Lithuanian part of the Programme area, unemployment level did not exceed the country's average (13.2 per cent) only in the counties locating the biggest cities, namely Kaunas (10.5) and Vilnius (12.8). Unemployment level in Kaunas county was equal to the EU-27 average. The highest unemployment levels were recorded in the predominantly rural counties, namely Alytus (14.7 per cent), Panevezys (16.5 per cent) and, especially, Utena (22.6 per cent).

Another grave issue observed in the Programme territory is unemployment among youth and pre-retirement age people (according to the standard set by the EU, 15-24 years old and 55-64 years old, respectively). In 2013 youth unemployment rate in Latvia exceeded 23 per cent, in Lithuania amounted to almost 22 per cent<sup>14</sup>, in Belarus was over 12 per cent<sup>15</sup>. Even though no statistical data on youth unemployment in Belarus is available on region level, judging from the experience of Latvian and Lithuanian parts of the Programme area, especially acute youth unemployment has been identified in the rural areas of the Programme, namely Latgale region, Alytus, Panevezys and Utena counties. Youth unemployment here was approximately 1.5 times higher than the countries' averages.

Unemployment level of pre-retirement age (55-64 years old) people in both Latvia and Lithuania has been decreasing since 2010. However, it still is relatively high, especially in the case of Latvia. The average unemployment level among people aged 55-64 in the period of 2010-2013 was over 10 per cent in Lithuania, while in Latvia it was much higher, exceeding 14 per cent. In Latvia, pre-retirement age might be distinguished as one of the most problematic age groups in workforce. In 2012, the share of unemployed aged 50 years and over comprised approximately one third of all unemployed and around 12 per cent of the long-term (unemployed for more than 1 year) unemployed. In the period of 2005-2008 (when the data on unemployment levels among different age groups in Belarus is available), the unemployment level among people both aged 50-54 and those over 55 years old was decreasing in Belarus. However, it should be noted that in this period the average

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<sup>13</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>), National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>), Eurostat (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>).

<sup>14</sup> Eurostat (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>).

<sup>15</sup> World Bank (<http://data.worldbank.org/>).

unemployment level was approximately more than 3 times higher among people aged 50-54 than among people over 55 years old. It reflects more accurate employment situation of pre-retirement age people in Belarus<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.6. Education

Youth unemployment depends both on education opportunities and labour market situation. Due to scarcely populated rural territories predominating in the Programme area, educational facilities in the region are relatively small with lower average number of pupils. Small schools might experience shortage of funds, and, consequently, face challenges in ensuring appropriate education quality, sufficient selection of courses and adequate infrastructure.

Furthermore, the numbers of students per 1,000 population in the vocational training institutions of the Programme area are generally higher than the countries' averages. However, no particular disparities between predominantly urban and predominantly rural regions were recorded. The highest numbers of students per 1,000 population were observed in both predominantly urban Minsk city and predominantly rural Alytus county, while the lowest - in predominantly rural Latgale region. Quite similar tendencies were recorded in the intermediate regions of the Programme area.

The main concentration of higher education institutions can be observed in the predominantly urban regions or regions locating biggest cities of the countries. Thus, Minsk city, Vilnius city and Kaunas city are the main hubs of national universities and colleges<sup>17</sup>. In addition, there exists a reasonable exchange of students among the participating countries. In recent years sufficient numbers of Latvians have come to study to Lithuania and the other way around. Moreover, more than 50 per cent of foreign students from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries studying in Lithuania came from Belarus. However, Belarus does not seem to be popular destination country for students from Latvia and Lithuania<sup>18</sup>.

## 2.7. Economic Performance

Economic performance, in terms of GDP per capita, is lower in the Programme area than the countries' averages. Furthermore, there are significant economic disparities among regions of the participating countries, especially between urban and rural areas of the Programme. In the period of 2009-2011 the largest GDP per capita on the Belarusian side of the Programme, in comparison to the national average, was in Minsk city, while the lowest was in Grodno,

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<sup>16</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>), National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>), Eurostat (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>).

<sup>17</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>), National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>), Latgale region development agency.

<sup>18</sup> Bernd Wächter „Student Mobility in Europe. Trends and Challenges“, Academic Cooperation Organization (ACO), 2012; International Organization for Migration, European Migration Network „International Students in Lithuania 2012“; Kristīne Bērziņa „Immigration of Foreign Students to Latvia“, 2012.

Vitebsk and Mogilyov regions. In Lithuania, the largest GDP per capita throughout the period of 2005-2010 was in Vilnius county (comprising nearly 150 per cent of the national average), while the lowest was in Alytus, Utena and Panevezys counties (approximately 66, 75 and 74 per cent of the national average, respectively). Latvian part of the Programme area, in terms of GDP per capita, is significantly lagging behind the country's average. In the period of 2005-2010 GDP per capita of Latgale and Zemgale on average represented less than 50 per cent of the national average.

According to the data of 2011-2012, majority of labour force of the region is employed in service and industry sectors (around 60 per cent and over 21 per cent, respectively). In all three participating countries service sector employees comprise more than half of the whole work force, while the average number of those employed in industry varies among countries. The average share of work force in industry sector is similar in Lithuanian counties and Latvian regions of the Programme (around 19 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively), while in Belarusian regions approximately one quarter of work force is employed in the industry sector. Considerably smaller share (over 11 per cent) of the total labour force of the region works in agriculture. Naturally, the largest share of employees from service and industry sectors might be discovered in urban areas (Minsk city in Belarus, Vilnius county in Lithuania), while more agricultural workers are visible in rural territorial units (Latgale and Zemgale regions in Latvia, Alytus, Utena, Panevezys counties in Lithuania, Minsk and Grodno regions in Belarus)<sup>19</sup>.

## **2.8. Business and Entrepreneurship**

In the period of 2005-2012 the number of small and medium enterprises per 10000 population has been increasing (in Belarus - rather fast), indicating improving business climate and entrepreneurial capabilities in the region. Although during the period of 2010-2012 the average number of enterprises per 10,000 population in Lithuanian counties was quite stable. The largest numbers of enterprises were in the predominantly urban areas of the Programme, namely Vilnius county and Minsk city. In the intermediate areas of the region, such as Kaunas county, as well as other Belarusian regions included in the Programme, the average numbers of enterprises per 10,000 population were similar to the countries' averages. The lowest numbers of small and medium enterprises have been discovered in the predominantly rural areas of the Programme, namely Utena and Alytus counties in Lithuania. On the Latvian side of the Programme area the constant gap, in terms of number of enterprises per 10,000 population, between Latgale and Zemgale regions on one side, and Latvia as a whole on the other has been observed<sup>20</sup>.

The Programme area contains wide variety of business support institutions, ranging from national to regional and local, from public to private. Important role in improving business environment in the participating countries is played by national institutions, established by

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<sup>19</sup> National statistical offices - Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>), National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

the governments of Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus. These institutions engage in different activities, aimed at, *inter alia*, attracting foreign investments, fostering export, implementing innovation policy, registering business entities, providing information for entrepreneurs, as well as financing for businesses of different size (especially, for small and medium sized enterprises). Regional and local public institutions in the Programme area focus mainly on development of entrepreneurship on regional and local levels, facilitating smooth functioning of business already present in the region and providing support for new businesses, including start-ups. A number of specialized business support institutions, such as business incubators, business information and support centres, and business gardens, are scattered across the Programme area, contributing to facilitation of entrepreneurship in the regions of the Programme.

For providing favourable conditions for developing business activities in the region, Special Economic Zones (SEZ), offering prepared industrial sites with physical and legal infrastructure, support services, and tax incentives, and Free Economic Zones (FEZ), offering special regime for entrepreneurial activity and special incentives for business development, have been established. In the Programme area the following SEZ and FEZ operate: Rezekne SEZ (Latgale region), Panevezys FEZ, Kaunas FEZ, Kedainiai SEZ (Kaunas county), Minsk SEZ, Vitebsk FEZ, Mogilyov FEZ and Grodno FEZ. Another effective business support structure is Industrial Parks (IP), attracting new businesses by providing an integrated infrastructure in one location. The latter are set up in the most important economic centres of the Programme area, namely Jelgava (Zemgale region), Daugavpils and Rezekne (Latgale region), Alytus, Kedainiai (Kaunas county), Ramygala (Panevezys county) and Minsk region. Furthermore, other types of institutions are involved in business support activities. The latter include non-governmental institutions, representing the interests of the entrepreneurs and providing various services to businesses, and private companies, consulting businesses and providing necessary information and training.

## **2.9. Research and Innovation**

Innovation capabilities of business in the region depend on the link between science and business in the Programme area. Significant role might be attributed to educational institutions, and research and development (R&D) centres, engaging in research and innovation activities. In the Programme territory a number of important higher education institutions, along with their research centres, are located. These include, *inter alia*, Daugavpils University, Rezekne Higher Education Institution, Latvia University of Agriculture, Vilnius University, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Kaunas University of Technology, Belarusian State University, Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno and Vitebsk State Technological University. Another important source of innovation in the Programme area is technology parks which are operating in the principal educational centres of the participating countries, namely in Rezekne (Latgale region), Jelgava and Aizkraukle (Zemgale region), Mogilyov region, a few - in Minsk region, and numerous in Vilnius and Kaunas counties. On Lithuanian side of the Programme territory (mainly, Vilnius and Kaunas counties), some integrated science, studies and business valleys, providing support to the



development and introduction of new technologies and products, operate. However, higher education institutions still mainly focus on teaching and/or pure scientific activities, and important R&D centres are mainly concentrated in only a few biggest cities of the Programme area.

Despite continuous effort to strengthen science-business cooperation, innovative capabilities in the Programme area is still limited. In Belarus the total expenditure on research and development (R&D), as a share of GDP, increased from 0.68 per cent in 2005 to 0.76 per cent in 2011. In 2007 this indicator largely decreased, however during recent years it has been recovering. Furthermore, in Belarus distribution of organizations engaged in R&D activities are uneven between urban and rural areas. The expenditure on R&D in both Latvia and Lithuania is increasing. In 2013, expenditure on R&D in Latvia and Lithuania had reached 0.6 and over 0.9 per cent of GDP, respectively. However, both Latvia and Lithuania are below the target of expenditure on R&D, set by the European Commission in Europe 2020 strategy<sup>21</sup>.

## 2.10. Environment

All three countries of the Programme can be distinguished for being rich in particular natural resources, namely forests and fresh water. The most forested regions of Belarusian part of the Programme territory are Vitebsk, Mogilyov (over a third of this region's land is forested) and Grodno<sup>22</sup>, while the most forested Lithuanian counties are Alytus (49 per cent) and Vilnius (44 per cent). Kaunas and Panevezys counties have comparatively smaller territories covered by forest (over 29 per cent and over 28 per cent, respectively), while Utena County's forest coverage (over 34 per cent) is close to the national average<sup>23</sup>. Due to uneven territorial distribution of woodlands in Latvia, only 18 per cent of Latgale region<sup>24</sup> but around 40 per cent of Zemgale region<sup>25</sup> is covered by forest. Furthermore, there are plenty of fresh water resources in Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus, far exceeding present and future requirements for water consumption in these countries.

Nevertheless, the Programme area fails to avoid certain environmental problems, such as air and water pollution, spread of invasive alien species. Due to intensive economic activities, the Programme area, especially industrial areas and cities with intensive transport flows (for example, Minsk city, Vitebsk region and Kaunas county), experience relatively high levels of air pollution. This problem might be less acute in areas more densely covered with forests which are important producers of oxygen and, thus, air purifiers. However, even high forest coverage has rather limited impact, since air pollution is a transboundary problem. In addition, extensive agricultural lands covering large part of the Programme area contribute to

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<sup>21</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>), National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>).

<sup>22</sup> Official website of the National Agency of Investment and Privatization of the Republic of Belarus (<http://www.investinbelarus.by/>).

<sup>23</sup> Statistics Lithuania „Natural Resources and Environmental Protection 2013“, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> „Common Spatial Development Strategy for Latgale and Vidzeme regions, Pskov and Leningrad oblast for years 2007-2027“, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Official website of Zemgale Planning Region (<http://www.zemgale.lv/>).

the pollution of international and trans-boundary waters. Parts of 3 river basins stretching across the territories of the participating countries are included in the Programme area (Daugava river basin (Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus), Lielupe river basin (Latvia-Lithuania), and Nemunas river basin (Lithuania-Belarus)<sup>26</sup>). The drainage basin acts as a funnel by collecting all the water within the area covered by the basin and channelling it to a single point. As water flows over the ground and along rivers it can pick up nutrients, sediment, and pollutants from point source (such as sewage water, plants, factories, etc.) and nonpoint sources (such as a fertilized agriculture lands). Even small amount of contaminants gathered from a large area finally has the cumulative effect. Therefore, water quality of rivers in one participating country depends on the pollution levels in other countries of the Programme<sup>27</sup>.

### **2.11. Tourism**

Richness in natural resources and cultural heritage in the Programme area provide basis for variety of tourism activities. Different kinds of tourism have been developed in the countries of the Programme. In both Latvia and Lithuania adventure and cultural tourism is especially relevant. Furthermore, clusters of medical tourism and resorts in these countries are engaged in tight cooperation. In addition, natural, agri- and eco-tourism is dynamically developing in all three participating countries.

Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus are strongly related in terms of visitors and tourist flows. In 2014, Belarus and Latvia were among top 3 origin countries of tourists coming to Lithuania. In the period of 2011-2013, the number of trips to Lithuania of one-day visitors from Belarus increased by around 42 per cent, while Lithuanian one-day visitors made approximately 15 per cent more trips to Belarus in 2013 than in 2011<sup>28</sup>. These flows may continue to grow provided that the intergovernmental agreement on local border traffic for the residents of the border areas of Belarus and Lithuania is enforced in the future. Belarus and Latvia enforced the local border traffic agreement on 1 February, 2012. Consequently, in the period of 2011-2013, the number of Belarusian visitors staying in accommodation facilities of Latvia increased by around 76 per cent<sup>29</sup>. Increasing flows of visitors and tourists among the participating countries show growing potential for development of tourism services and related industries in all three participating countries.

### **2.12. Transport Flows**

Trade flows between the participating countries have been increasing. In the period of 2011-2013, export from Latvia to Belarus, as well as from Lithuania to Belarus, increased by around 22 per cent. Even though import from Belarus to Latvia decreased by around 36 per cent, import from Belarus to Lithuania increased by the same percentage during the same

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<sup>26</sup> International rivers basins in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR Interreg III B project) (<http://www.baltex-research.eu/material/downloads/riverbasins.pdf>).

<sup>27</sup> Lithuania's Environmental Protection Agency (<http://vanduo.gamta.lt/>).

<sup>28</sup> Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>).

<sup>29</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/en>).

period<sup>30</sup>. These trends have, consequently, resulted in the more intense activity at border-crossing points. Due to specific geographical conditions of the participating countries, the primary means of transportation of people and cargo are road transport and railway.

Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus have always been transit countries. The borders of Lithuania and Latvia are borders of European Union. Therefore, regions of the Programme area are connected via important transit routes. Major international motorways between Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) run through all the regions of Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus. Several important railway transit corridors (VIA Baltica, VIA Hansaetica) cross Latgale and Zemgale regions, and Panevezys, Kaunas, Vilnius counties. Minsk region is at the crossroads of several major transport routes, connecting Western Europe with the East, and the Black Sea coastal regions with the Baltic Sea states.

On the Latvia-Belarus border there are two road border-crossing points and one railway border-crossing point. Both road border-crossing points, namely Silene-Urbany and Paternieki-Grigorovshchina, and railway border-crossing point, Indra-Bigosovo, are situated on the border of Latgale region - Vitebsk region<sup>31</sup>. The average permeability of Latvian-Belarusian border-crossing is 645 freight transport vehicles per day. The highest permissible permeability of Silene-Urbany border-crossing point almost twice exceeds that of Paternieki-Grigorovshchina<sup>32</sup>. On the Lithuania-Belarus border there are four road border-crossing points and two railway border-crossing points. Road border-crossing points, namely Salcininkai-Benyakoni, Medininkai-Kamennyi Log and Lvoriskes-Kotlovka, as well as railway border-crossing points, Stasylos-Benyakoni and Kena-Gudogay, are situated on the border of Vilnius county - Grodno region, while road border-crossing point Raigardas-Privalka - on the border of Alytus county - Grodno region<sup>33</sup>. The average permeability of these border-crossing points is 1300 freight transport vehicles per day. Medininkai-Kamennyi Log border-crossing point has the highest permissible permeability, Salcininkai-Benyakoni - the lowest, while Lvoriskes-Kotlovka and Raigardas-Privalka are somewhere in between<sup>34</sup>.

Taking into account increasing cargo and people flows among the participating countries, operational capacity of border-crossing facilities on both Latvia-Belarus and Lithuania-Belarus borders is not sufficient. Furthermore, the conditions of different border-crossing points vary, contributing to uneven border-crossing efficiency in the Programme area. The length of vehicle queues at the border of Latvia-Belarus can be up to 2-7 kilometres long during peak time, the average waiting time at the border - 1 to 3 hours, while the average transit time - 2 to 3 hours, but in some periods when on a border crossing point the queue of 200-250 lorries is formed, the maximum waiting time can reach even 48 hours. The crossing process for one vehicle on Latvian-Belarusian border takes on average 1 to 2 hours<sup>35</sup>. The length of vehicle queues at the border of Lithuania-Belarus can be up to 12 kilometres long during peak time, the average waiting time at the border - 3 to 4 hours, while the average

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<sup>30</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/en>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>).

<sup>31</sup> Belarus tourism website (<http://beltur.biz/>).

<sup>32</sup> Belarus tourism website ([http://www.sanatorii.by/?granica\\_tamojnva\\_belarus](http://www.sanatorii.by/?granica_tamojnva_belarus)).

<sup>33</sup> Belarus tourism website (<http://beltur.biz/>).

<sup>34</sup> Customs of the Republic of Lithuania (<http://www.cust.lt/>).

<sup>35</sup> Belarus tourism website ([http://www.sanatorii.by/?granica\\_tamojnva\\_belarus](http://www.sanatorii.by/?granica_tamojnva_belarus)).

transit time - 2 to 3 hours. However, depending on the season, day of the week and time of the day, it might take up to 7-20 hours to cross Latvia-Belarus or Lithuania-Belarus border<sup>36</sup>.

*Table 2. SWOT analysis of the Programme area*

STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
Participating countries share common history, thus, the regions of the Programme are inhabited by relatively large minority populations.	Common history and multicultural populations in the participating countries create favourable conditions for engaging in successful cross-border cooperation.
The majority of the territorial units of the Programme area are predominantly rural (according to the Eurostat urban-rural typology of NUTS 3 regions).	Plenty predominantly rural territorial units in the Programme area are advantageous for evolving local communities able to actively solve common problems.
The Programme area is rich in natural resources (especially, forests and fresh water), as well as in tangible and intangible cultural heritage.	Richness in natural resources and cultural heritage in the Programme area provides the basis for developing various tourism activities.
Different kinds of tourism (adventure, cultural, medical, natural, agri-, eco-, etc.) have been developed in the participating countries.	Experience of the participating countries in developing different forms of tourism might be advantageous for cross-border cooperation in the field of culture and cultural heritage.
Flows of one day visitors among the participating countries have been steadily increasing.	Increasing flows of one day visitors among the participating countries show growing potential for further development of tourism and related services in the Programme area.
The numbers of students per 1,000 population in vocational training institutions of the Programme area are generally higher than the countries' averages.	Relatively higher numbers of students in vocational training institutions in the Programme area reveals the potential for development of human capital.
A number of higher education institutions, along with their research centres, integrated science, studies and business valleys, as well as technology parks in the Programme area engage in research and innovation activities.	Engagement of higher education institutions and technology parks of the Programme area in research and innovation activities shows the potential for further development of RDI sector.
The number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Programme area has been increasing.	Increasing number of SMEs in the Programme area indicates improving business climate and entrepreneurial capacities, and, thus, shows the potential for further development of entrepreneurship.
The Programme area contains wide variety of business support institutions, as well as numerous Special Economic Zones, Free Economic Zones and Industrial Parks.	Abundance of various business support institutions and areas favourable for business development is advantageous for business development.
Import and export flows among the participating	Increasing import and export flows among the participating countries show the potential for more

<sup>36</sup> Measurements by the EU Delegation to Belarus, Customs of the Republic of Lithuania (<http://www.cust.lt/>).

countries have been increasing.	intensive economic ties.
WEAKNESSES	THREATS
Low birth rate and negative net migration lead to population decline and increase in the proportion of older people in the Programme area.	Due to increasing proportion of older people in the Programme area, the share of working-age people might decrease, resulting in deteriorating economic capacities of the region. In order to avoid that, measures to increase the economic activity of older people should be taken.
Life expectancy is several years shorter in the Programme area, compared to the neighbouring urban regions and the EU average.	Relatively shorter life expectancy in the Programme area indicates possibly worse social conditions, including availability of social and other services. This indicator might continue to worsen, unless necessary measures to increase the accessibility to various services are taken.
The share of population at risk of poverty or social exclusion exceeds the EU average in significant part of the Programme area.	Relatively larger share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the Programme area indicates the existence of different social problems and possibly insufficient social inclusion efforts. This indicator might continue to worsen, unless necessary measures to increase social inclusion are taken.
The majority of the territorial units of the Programme area are predominantly rural, resulting in low population density.	Due to low population density in most of the regions of the Programme, accessibility to social and other services might be poorer, while the potential to develop traditional public services is limited. In order to increase the accessibility to services, necessary measures to create non-traditional services provided by alternative actors should be taken.
Economic performance, in terms of GDP <i>per capita</i> , in the Programme area is worse than the countries' averages. In addition, significant economic disparities are observed among the regions of the Programme (especially between urban and rural).	Relatively worse and uneven economic performance in the Programme area might result in considerable gaps in well-being of the population and inequality. In order to avoid it, necessary measures to increase social inclusion and entrepreneurial capacities should be taken.
Unemployment levels in the regions involved in the Programme largely exceed the countries' averages, especially in the predominantly rural areas. Furthermore, youth (15-29 years old) and people of pre-retirement age (55-64 years old in EU member states, 50-59 years old in Belarus) are especially vulnerable to the unemployment.	Relatively lower unemployment rates, especially that of youth and people of pre-retirement age, in the Programme area indicate insufficient human capital and entrepreneurial capacities. These indicators might further worsen, unless necessary measures to develop human resources, in particular of the above-mentioned age groups, are taken.
The main higher education, research and innovation institutions, as well as majority of enterprises, are concentrated in the predominantly urban regions of the Programme area.	Concentration of education, research, innovation and business organisations in the predominantly urban regions might result in uneven human capital, as well as innovation and entrepreneurial capacities. In order to avoid it, necessary measures to increase skills of people living in the whole Programme area should be taken.
Due to intensive economic activities in both industrial areas and agricultural lands, the Programme area experiences air and water pollution.	Unless joint efforts to deal with common environmental problems are taken by the participating countries, their environmental situation

<p>Since the countries of the Programme share the river basin and forest coverage is uneven in the regions of the Programme, participating countries face common environmental problems.</p>	<p>might further worsen and, consequently, affect others.</p>
<p>Operational capacities of border-crossing facilities on both Latvia-Belarus border (2 road and 1 railway) and Lithuania-Belarus border (4 road and 2 railway) are uneven and largely insufficient.</p>	<p>Uneven and insufficient operational capacities of border-crossing facilities in the Programme area might result in gaps in border-crossing efficiency and obstacles to mobility of goods and people. In order to avoid that, necessary measures to improve both infrastructure and human resources of border-crossing points should be taken.</p>

## 3. PROGRAMME STRATEGY

### 3.1. Context of the Programme

This Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) Programme is financed by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), created to support the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

The ENP, developed after the 2004 enlargement of the EU and revised in 2011, was designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours. The main objective of the ENP is to share the benefits of the EU with sixteen neighbouring countries in the South and East of the EU, in order to strengthen stability, security and well-being for all concerned. Within the ENP, the EU offers its neighbours a privileged relationship, building upon a mutual commitment to common values – democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development. In addition, the ENP provides neighbouring countries with an opportunity to participate in various EU activities, programmes, as well as access to increased financial and technical assistance.

The ENP provides a variety of instruments, as well as different bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation initiatives. The main financial instrument, aimed at supporting the ENP through concrete assistance actions, was the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). It was established in 2007, replacing the co-operation programmes TACIS (for the Eastern European countries) and MEDA (for the Mediterranean countries). The goal of the ENPI was to create an area of shared values, stability and prosperity, enhanced co-operation and deeper economic and regional integration by covering a wide range of co-operation areas. It enhanced bilateral, regional and sectorial cooperation.

From 2014, the ENPI is replaced by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). It is an increasingly policy-driven instrument, which is aimed at providing increased differentiation, more flexibility, stricter conditionality and incentives for best performers. Part of ENI funds is reserved for cross-border co-operation under which the ENI finances joint programmes, bringing together regions of Member States and partner countries that share a common border. The CBC has three strategic objectives:

- promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders;
- address common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security;
- promote better conditions and modalities for facilitating the mobility of persons, goods and capital.

ENI CBC involves regions on both sides of the EU's border into joint projects, in which the partners share one single budget, common management structures, a common legal framework and implementation rules, giving the programmes a fully balanced partnership between the participating countries.

The main objective of the ENI programmes is to contribute to the development of a special relationship with neighbouring countries, with the aim of establishing an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation as it is stated in Article 8 of the Treaty on European Union.

### **3.2. Description and Justification of the Programme Strategy**

On the basis on the objectives defined for ENP outlined in the Regulation (EU) No 232/2014, the Programme shall contribute to strengthening relations with partner countries and promote enhanced political cooperation and progressive economic integration. The strategic goal defined for the Programme is:

***To strengthen relations, raise capacities and share experience among people and organisations from Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus through implementation of joined actions aimed at increasing the overall quality of life in the border regions.***

This overall goal encompasses objectives to contribute to the positive changes in specific fields, including social, educational, health care, environmental, tourism, safety and security sectors. The Programme aims to facilitate two-fold improvement. On the one hand, the Programme shall support enhancement of public sector's skills and tools for providing services at regional level. On the other hand, the Programme shall pay a particular attention to the development of social capital in the region, encouraging activity of the third sector - NGOs, communities, local inhabitants.

In order to contribute to the achievement of the strategic goal, the Programme encompasses the following Thematic Objectives (TOs) selected in accordance with TOs from the ENI Programming document (hereinafter - ENI TO):

1. TO1. Promotion of social inclusion and fight against poverty (corresponding to ENI TO 4);
2. TO2. Support to local and regional good governance (corresponding to ENI TO 5);
3. TO3. Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage (corresponding to ENI TO 3);
4. TO4. Promotion of border management and border security (corresponding to ENI TO 10).

The TOs and corresponding priorities of the Programme were identified as a result of a multi-tier analysis. To support the selection of the TOs, a socio-economic analysis of the Programme area, a review of the strategic documents, an analysis of the previous experience, a survey of local and regional authorities, among other methods, were employed. Synthetic overview of the justification of the selected TOs and corresponding priorities is presented below.



### 3.2.1. Promotion of Social Inclusion and Fight against Poverty (TO 1)

Issues identified in the socio-economic analysis of the Programme area (ageing society, relatively shorter life expectancy and relatively larger share of population at risk of poverty or social exclusion) has revealed signs of social exclusion in the regions of the Programme. Share of pre-retirement age (55-64 years old in the case of Latvia and Lithuania, 50-59 years old in the case of Belarus) people in Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus exceeded 12, 11 and 15 per cent of the total population, respectively<sup>37</sup>. In 2011, in Belarusian part of the Programme area (except for Minsk city) life expectancy was on average lower than 70 years, while in Lithuania and Latvia it was equal to around 74 years, in comparison with the EU average of more than 80 years. In the period of 2008-2011 share of population at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Latvia and Lithuania had been increasing, exceeding the EU average. In 2012 the value of this indicator decreased, although it was still higher than the EU average<sup>38</sup>. Risk of social exclusion refers to processes whereby certain individuals or entire communities are systematically prevented from exercising rights, using opportunities and accessing resources.

Important prerequisite for mitigating the risk of social exclusion is provision of necessary social and other services to vulnerable groups. The latter might encompass various groups that experience a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population, including children, women, physically or mentally disabled, elderly, minorities, ex-cons, those struggling with substance abuse, homeless, long-term unemployed, etc. However, the vulnerability of certain groups depends on the context of particular country/region. Provision of services might positively contribute to the well-being of vulnerable groups, for example, by improving physical or mental health, advancing opportunities and quality of life, strengthening independence from other people, assisting families of persons with special needs, promoting special educational or employment tools.

However, taking into account, that, according to the Eurostat urban-rural typology of NUTS 3 regions, the majority of the Programme area is predominantly rural or intermediate, accessibility to social and other services provided there might be poorer than in the urban areas. Due to relatively low population density in most of the regions of the Programme, possibilities of creating and maintaining traditional public social services are limited. Moreover, it is widely accepted that non-residential (short-term), as opposed to residential (long-term), social and other services are more appropriate in order to enhance social inclusion of vulnerable groups. Residential care institutions generally provide care for persons with severe diseases or disabilities, thus, they should only be used as a last resort. Whereas non-residential care institutions serve as providers of transitional care focusing on socialization and prevention. Therefore, some portion of people belonging to vulnerable groups would be able to live in their places of residence and not be excluded from the society,

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<sup>37</sup> The census of 2011 in Latvia, Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>); the Census of 2011 in Lithuania, Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>); official statistics of 2013 in Belarus, National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>).

<sup>38</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>), National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>), Eurostat (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>).

provided that sufficient number of proper non-residential social and other services were available to them.

Nevertheless, the socio-economic analysis has shown that countries participating in the Programme have largely relied on relatively dense residential network of social and other services. For example, in the period of 2010-2012, the number of elderly and disabled adults in residential social care institutions had been steadily growing by around 2 per cent in the entire Programme area<sup>39</sup>. It is important to make social and other community services more de-institutionalized and de-centralized, involving new actors (e.g. local communities, NGOs) in the development and provision of relevant services. Such need has been placed high on both the EU and national agendas. Moreover, it is important to extend the scope of social and other services' providers, taking into account that often communities and community-based NGOs are more innovative in finding solutions corresponding to local needs.

Presently, independent community-based social service market is scarce with only sporadic third sector's initiatives. In particular, NGOs, among other organisations, could play an important role in taking over part of social and other services' provision to local communities. There are numerous NGOs in both Latvia and Lithuania that are highly developed and active in these countries' social life. A slightly different situation might be observed with regard to Belarusian NGOs. NGO activities in Belarus cover a wide range of socially significant issues, dealing with problems of social groups difficult for authorities to address. Even though NGOs in Belarus possess a high potential for innovation and further development, the number of these organisations is small, most of them are small-scale, operate primarily in Minsk and other big cities and lack sufficient financing. Therefore, cross-border cooperation in provision of social and other services could provide, among other benefits, an opportunity for NGOs in Belarus to gain experience from their counterparts in other countries of the Programme and, at the same time, develop their capacities necessary for facilitating access to relevant services for vulnerable groups.

As experience from the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ENPI CBC 2007-2013 programme has shown, there are various actors who may be willing to cooperate with partners from neighbouring countries in developing alternative social and other services. The initiative implemented by the Red Cross organisations in Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus, targeting the development of health and social services, might be singled out as a good practice example from the previous programming period. The latter suggests the possibility for launching common initiatives by the branches of international NGOs operating in two or all three of the participating countries. Furthermore, only around 9 per cent of the projects (amounting to only 6 per cent of the total funding) financed under the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ENPI CBC 2007-2013 programme were those targeting the improvement of social and other services for vulnerable groups<sup>40</sup>. Taking into account still relevant social exclusion and poverty risks in

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<sup>39</sup> Calculation based on the official statistics of 2010-2012, available at Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>), National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>).

<sup>40</sup> Calculation based on the monitoring data provided by the Joint Technical Secretariat.

the Programme area, it is important to mitigate the latter by continuing and increasing support for vulnerable groups.

*In order to enhance the access to social and other services for vulnerable groups in the Programme area, developing new and/or improving the existent social or other services through cross-border cooperation is necessary.*

Social exclusion might arise from the existence of obstacles to participation in labour market. Thus, the risk of social exclusion also depends on the situation in the labour market. The socio-economic analysis has revealed the worrying trends of unemployment, especially among young and pre-retirement age people, in the Programme area. Unemployment of youth and people of pre-retirement age is a matter of an utmost importance, since these groups form a significant part of working-age population. In 2013, youth unemployment rate in Latvia exceeded 23 per cent, in Lithuania amounted to almost 22 per cent<sup>41</sup> while in Belarus was over 12 per cent<sup>42</sup>. In the period of 2010-2013, the average unemployment level among pre-retirement age people (55-64 years old) in Latvia and Lithuania exceeded 14 and 10 per cent, respectively<sup>43</sup>. In the period of 2005-2008 (when the data on unemployment levels among different age groups in Belarus was available), the average unemployment level among people aged 50-54 was more than 3 times higher than that of people over 55 years old<sup>44</sup>.

The situation regarding youth unemployment is deteriorating taking into account worrying migration patterns of the Programme area. Large-scale emigration to foreign countries offering better work opportunities and comparatively higher wages (in the case of Latvia and Lithuania), and internal migration from rural areas and small towns to urban areas and big cities with lower poverty rates, better employment opportunities and higher wages (in the case of Belarus) might be observed in the region. Lower employability of pre-retirement age people is basically a result of mismatch between skills possessed by people of pre-retirement age and labour market needs, on one hand, and discrimination based on age in labour market of the Programme area, on the other. Professional qualifications and work experience previously attained by older employees might no longer be relevant taking into consideration rapidly changing work environment. Furthermore, some evidence reveals the existence of negative attitudes of employers towards older workers based on sometimes false beliefs that employees of this age group tend to be less productive, more likely to get sick, and incapable of learning new skills and adapting to changes. Lack of active social partners, able to represent the interests of the older employees, is only adding to the problem.

These problems affect not only contemporary economic situation but may damage economic growth of the region in the future, as well. In addition, the extent of unemployment is directly proportionate to the gravity of social problems in the society. Thus, availability of jobs and quality of employment are essential for mitigating the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Each of the participating countries has taken various measures aimed at combating

<sup>41</sup> Eurostat (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>).

<sup>42</sup> World Bank (<http://data.worldbank.org/>).

<sup>43</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (<http://www.csb.gov.lv/>), Statistics Lithuania (<http://www.stat.gov.lt/>).

<sup>44</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (<http://belstat.gov.by/>).

unemployment, including education and career e-services, entrepreneurship centres, preparation of competent specialists to work with youth, promotion of non-formal education. Initiatives of this and similar kind could condition more favourable results regarding employment situation in the Programme area when implemented jointly by all the countries concerned.

Cooperation of such actors from Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus as youth affairs coordinators, NGOs, employers' associations, trade unions, educational institutions and entrepreneurs would provide an opportunity to discuss and assess various labour policy initiatives. Exchange of information and sharing of best practices could trigger joint actions in tackling unemployment (especially that of youth and pre-retirement age people) in the region. Development of co-operation platform for Latvian and Lithuanian vocational schools and entrepreneurs by joint efforts of Utena county and Latgale region in the framework of Latvia-Lithuania ETC CBC 2007-2013 programme could be distinguished as an exemplary initiative.

With the aim of promoting more active participation in the labour market of the Programme area, improving the system of vocational and professional training is important. Previous experience has revealed only sporadic efforts aimed directly at unemployed which are insufficient. Education system is one of the most effective instruments capable of keeping young people within the region and positively affecting skilled labour force supply there. In order to prepare people for the labour market and develop their entrepreneurial skills, the broader interaction and resource sharing between educational institutions (secondary schools, vocational training and higher education institutions) and local labour market (businesses) is crucial. Appropriate measures should be taken in order to improve teaching programmes and develop apprenticeship programmes, linking them with labour market needs. Moreover, the importance of life-long learning should be taken into consideration. Cooperation of relevant stakeholders (social partners, educational institutions and public organizations) in development of training and employment programmes could help reduce the gap between the existent skills and labour market needs.

Only around 7 per cent of the projects (amounting to only 2 per cent of the total funding) financed under the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ENPI CBC 2007-2013 programme addressed employment and entrepreneurship. Half of them were targeted at youth, confirming that this group is among the most severely affected by the unemployment in the region<sup>45</sup>. Taking into account rather unfavourable employment trends in the Programme area, it is important to continue and strengthen support in tackling unemployment, especially among youth and pre-retirement age people.

*In order to create greater employment opportunities in the Programme area, developing employability and entrepreneurial capacities of people, especially young and pre-retirement age, through cross-border cooperation and exchange of good*

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<sup>45</sup> Calculation based on the monitoring data provided by the Joint Technical Secretariat.

*practices is necessary.*

### 3.2.2. Support to Local and Regional Good Governance (TO 2)

The socio-economic analysis of the Programme area has revealed that Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus face common environmental risks, such as air and transboundary water pollution. Parts of 3 river basins stretching across the territories of the participating countries are included in the Programme area (Daugava river basin (Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus), Lielupe river basin (Latvia-Lithuania), and Nemunas river basin (Lithuania-Belarus)<sup>46</sup>). Water flowing over the ground and along rivers might pick up various contaminants, affecting the whole river basin. Therefore, water quality of rivers in one participating country depends on the pollution levels in other countries of the Programme<sup>47</sup>.

Such natural and man-made disasters recognize no boundaries, thus, require joint action by authorities of the neighbouring states in mitigating these risks. The key to successful cooperation among authorities is support for local and regional good governance. OECD defines governance as processes by which decisions are made and implemented (or not implemented). The fundamental principles of good governance include, *inter alia*, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity and inclusiveness, and effectiveness and efficiency. The primary actors involved in the governance are national, regional and local authorities. According to UNDP, performance, adaptability and stability are the three critical qualities necessary for public institutions in changing environments.

Institutional performance, measured by effectiveness and efficiency, is considered to be the foundation of state's capacity to fulfil its obligations towards its citizens (delivering services, ensuring protection of rights, providing security, among others). Even though governance reforms, targeted at improving capacities of authorities and providing better tools for facilitating decision-making and implementation processes, have recently been undertaken in the countries of the Programme, the cross-border aspect has been rarely addressed. Nevertheless, there are some public policy fields whose management is highly dependent on the actions carried out over a larger area. In particular, actions limited to the national level may be insufficient to solve problems of a more general nature, such as environmental pollution, safety and security.

Participating countries have taken part in the similar or joint environmental initiatives, financed by international partners. Latvia and Lithuania also cooperate with Belarus under the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership launched by the EU with the purpose of helping Belarus tackle some of the most pressing environmental problems in the Northern Dimension Area covering the Baltic and Barents Seas region. Experience of the participating countries in the multilateral environmental initiatives could facilitate direct cooperation among these countries without assistance from third actors. Authorities of Latvia, Lithuania

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<sup>46</sup> International rivers basins in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR Interreg III B project) (<http://www.baltex-research.eu/material/downloads/riverbasins.pdf>).

<sup>47</sup> Lithuania's Environmental Protection Agency (<http://vanduo.gamta.lt/>).

and Belarus shall actively cooperate in developing common systems and tools to manage natural resources, prevent various disasters and eliminate their consequences. It might consequently increase adaptability (capacity to anticipate, adapt and respond to challenges) and stability (institutionalization of good practices in risk management) of authorities in the Programme area, contributing to the strengthening of good governance in the region.

Around 4 per cent of projects (amounting to almost 11 per cent of the total funding) financed under the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ENPI CBC 2007-2013 programme were targeted at capacities of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges<sup>48</sup>. Taking into account that risks in this area (namely natural and man-made disasters) are constant and require continuous attention, it is reasonable to further support cross-border cooperation of authorities in mitigating common risks.

*In order to enhance capacities of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges, increasing cross-border cooperation among authorities of the Programme area in dealing with natural and man-made disasters is necessary.*

Good governance also requires public institutions and governmental processes to be responsive to the present and future needs and risks of the society. In order to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interests of the society or a particular community, mediation of differing interests is crucial. Besides authorities, non-governmental actors, such as NGOs and local communities, should be involved in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Therefore, strengthening society by boosting participation of local actors in local affairs is crucial prerequisite for increasing responsiveness and social accountability of authorities, promoting social inclusion and successfully dealing with common challenges.

In recent years, both academic writings and strategic documents (including Europe 2020) have emphasized the role of communities in strengthening society and solving the most severe social problems. Over the years it has been noticed that social aid provided by institutions, local, regional or national authorities does not always prove efficient or able to meet specific needs of individuals or groups. Thus, local inhabitants (represented by NGOs, community organisations, etc.) should be encouraged to become more active and self-regulated in order to receive resources and make best joint decisions on their use.

According to the Eurostat urban-rural typology of NUTS 3 regions, the majority of the Programme territory consists of the predominantly rural areas. The latter create more favourable conditions for evolving local communities. According to researches, local communities of rural areas or old traditional residential districts in towns, due to residential stability, are more mature and sustainable. Thus, they are more eager to involve more actively in various local affairs, for instance, organising community security initiatives, providing basic services, etc. On the other hand, in the case of the post-Soviet countries, communal activeness and organisational maturity is still scarce. Local population gather mostly for

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<sup>48</sup> Calculation based on the monitoring data provided by the Joint Technical Secretariat.

minor cultural, recreational activities or environment cleaning campaigns, lacking the capacity or, at times, courage to get involved in larger activities directed towards addressing local needs. However, varying level of maturity of local organisations creates good opportunities for exchange of experience and cooperation between communities across the border. Common historical past of the participating countries might facilitate this process.

In order to achieve long-term results and tangible effects, one of the best ways of increasing capacities of local actors is for them to apply the principle of learning-by-doing, i.e. to engage practically in cross-border cooperation with the communities of other participating countries. Therefore, support under this Programme shall be directed towards joint activities of various communities of the Programme area. These joint activities could contribute to the accumulation of experience of the participating actors, encourage introduction of social innovations, and seek for more efficient governance solutions in the most problematic areas of the region.

As much as 25 per cent of projects (amounting to around 19 per cent of the total funding) financed under the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ENPI CBC 2007-2013 programme were those addressing various actions aimed at strengthening society in the Programme area<sup>49</sup>. The main actors engaged in these actions were governmental (especially, municipal) institutions. However, this Programme seeks to activate non-governmental actors in the region. Thus, it is important to continue support for this kind of activities encouraging the involvement of third-sector in the latter.

*In order to strengthen society, increasing cross-border cooperation among local non-governmental actors of the Programme area is necessary.*

### **3.2.3. Promotion of Local Culture and Preservation of Historical Heritage (TO 3)**

On one hand, shared historical background of the participating countries resulted in certain similarities within Latvian, Lithuanian and Belarusian regions, common historical and cultural heritage, as well as bilingual or even trilingual character of people living close to the border. On the other hand, different regions of the Programme have managed to maintain their authenticity. Thus, the Programme area encompasses wide variety of local communities with unique cultures and traditions worth preserving.

Richness in cultural heritage, as well as abundant natural resources, in the Programme area provides the basis for variety of tourism activities. Sustainable use of cultural and historical heritage contributes to attractiveness of the region and further development of tourism in the regions of the Programme. The socio-economic analysis of the Programme area has revealed that there is a growing potential for further development of different kinds of tourism and related services in the region. However, currently cultural and historical heritage in the Programme area is relatively untapped. Cooperation among Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus in promoting the region is crucial for mitigating this risk and, consequently, attracting more

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<sup>49</sup> Calculation based on the monitoring data provided by the Joint Technical Secretariat.

tourists and improving various economic indicators of the region. Joint efforts by all three participating countries in advertising their region might be more fruitful in drawing up the attention towards the Programme area than actions taken separately by individual states.

In addition, special attention has to be paid to enhancing human capital of local communities. In particular, creative use of local heritage and unique traditions might be useful in order to stimulate economic growth in the region. Encouraging local craftsmen and artists to use their traditional skills in economic activity might positively contribute to development of entrepreneurship in local communities. According to the results of the socio-economic analysis, even though the number of enterprises in all three participating countries has been increasing, significant number of them are concentrated in urban areas. Development and utilisation of traditional skills might provide an opportunity for residents of rural areas to shift their focus from possibly nonviable activities in agriculture, fishery and other areas, and engage in more untapped and promising ancient crafts or authentic household activities. This could result in the increase of entrepreneurship level in rural areas of the Programme and positively affect local economic activity there by creation of new businesses. Vital local cultures may also attract more tourists, possibly leading to the increased demand for traditional production. However, encouraging local inhabitants to change the forms of their economic activities might be a difficult task to achieve by sole efforts of national authorities which might be incapable of providing sufficient funding to this kind of initiatives. Therefore, cooperation among participating countries and sufficient funding from the ERDF might be of crucial importance.

Finally, preservation of intangible cultural heritage might be significant not only for economic purposes but for educational and other needs of local communities, too. Active and vibrant cultural life of local communities contributes to not only preservation and development of local heritage itself but to the development of regional identity and a sense of belonging, as well. Furthermore, cooperation among Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus in organising joint cultural activities and various regional exchanges across the border might contribute to the reduction of social exclusion, strengthen communities and sustain the vitality of rural communities that also correspond to the goals emphasized in Europe 2020. It also enables building of social capital - a factor of exceptional importance for strengthening the region's competitiveness.

Cross-border cooperation in this area has also proved to be important for people living in the Programme area in the previous programming period, when almost 28 per cent of the projects (amounting to around 27 per cent of the total funding) implemented under Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ENPI CBC 2007-2013 programme were those addressing promotion and protection of cultural and historical heritage<sup>50</sup>. Thus, in order to effectively exploit heritage in the region, it is important to continue support for its protection and promotion.

*In order to promote and preserve cultural heritage and traditional skills in the Programme area, stimulating active and sustainable use of cultural heritage through*

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<sup>50</sup> Calculation based on the monitoring data provided by the Joint Technical Secretariat.



*cross-border cooperation is necessary.*

### 3.2.4. Promotion of Border Management and Border Security (TO 4)

Socio-economic analysis of the Programme area has revealed that, in the context of increasing visitors, import and export flows among the participating countries, operational capacity of border-crossing facilities on both Latvia-Belarus and Lithuania-Belarus borders is not sufficient, contributing to uneven border-crossing efficiency in the Programme area. However, good communication is crucial for more active cooperation among Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus in tourism and related services, as well as in commercial activities.

In order to increase and harmonize the efficiency of border-crossing on Latvia-Belarus and Lithuania-Belarus borders, the participating countries should engage in joint actions aimed at improving current infrastructural and organisational capacities of border-crossing points. Improving and developing infrastructure, increasing human capacities in border-crossing facilities and optimising administrative provisions of border-crossing are of crucial importance.

The importance of improving border-crossing efficiency can be further justified by the scope of attention for this aim in the previous programming period. 11 per cent of the projects (amounting to as much as 25 per cent of the total funding) targeting border-crossing facilities were financed under the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ENPI CBC programme. In order to harmonize the capacities of the border-crossing facilities in the region, further investments are required.

*In order to promote border management and border security in the Programme area, improving infrastructure, human resources and administrative provisions of border-crossing facilities on Latvia-Belarus and Lithuania-Belarus borders is necessary.*

## 3.3. Overview of the Programme Strategy

*Table 3. The Programme strategy*

Thematic Objective	Priorities	Result indicators corresponding to the Priority	EU support (EUR)
<b>1. Promotion of social inclusion and fight against poverty</b>	1.1. Enhancing the access to social and other services for vulnerable groups	Number of new/improved and/or more accessible social or other services for vulnerable groups in the Programme area	<b>16,500,000</b>

	1.2. Stimulating employment through entrepreneurship and innovations	Number of people in the Programme area who have received support in developing their employability and entrepreneurial capacities, of whom:  - youth;  - pre-retirement age people;  - other.	
<b>2. Support to local and regional good governance</b>	2.1. Increasing capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges	Number of institutions involved in joint decision making process with regards to the common challenges	<b>14,400,000</b>
	2.2. Strengthening society	Number of organisations that have established or maintained durable cross-border cooperation links	
<b>3. Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage</b>	3.1. Promoting and preserving cultural and historical heritage and traditional skills	Number of tourists accommodated per 1000 population in the Programme area	<b>16,000,000</b>
<b>4. Promotion of border management and border security</b>	4.1 Enhancing border-crossing efficiency	Number of border crossing points with increased throughput capacity	<b>19,700,000</b>
<b>Technical assistance</b>	N/A	N/A	<b>7,400,000</b>

### 3.4. Cross-cutting Issues

#### 3.4.1. Environmental Sustainability

One of the most important cross-cutting issues to be addressed in the Programme is environmental sustainability. In the Communication “Mainstreaming Sustainable Development into EU Policies: 2009 Review of the European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development” (COM(2009) 400 final) sustainable development is defined as implementation of economic, social and environmental policies in a mutually reinforcing way. The above-

mentioned document highlights the possibility to mainstream the sustainability dimension into such policy fields as climate change and clean energy, sustainable transport, sustainable consumption and production, and conservation and management of natural resources. The principle of environmental sustainability will be directly mainstreamed into the interventions of the Programme in three ways.

Firstly, *Priority 2.1. “Increasing capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges”* of the Programme foresees coordinated actions by the different (national, regional, and local) authorities of the participating countries in tackling common challenges, in particular, natural and man-made disasters and environmental pollution, including air and water pollution. Thus, actions to be supported under this priority will instantly contribute to environmental sustainability.

Secondly, *Priority 3.1. “Promoting and preserving cultural and historical heritage and traditional skills”* of the Programme aims at promoting sustainable use of cultural and historical heritage in the Programme area. This entails preserving and adapting to various use heritage objects, without causing negative impact on the environment. Therefore, actions to be supported under Priority 3.1 will be carried out in line with the principle of environmental sustainability. Furthermore, strategic environmental assessment (SEA) has recognised that actions to be supported under the above-mentioned priority could have negative impact on the environment if they were implemented in the environmentally sensitive areas. Thus, necessary efforts will be made to avoid implementation of any actions in such areas.

Thirdly, *Priority 2.2. “Strengthening society”* of the Programme encompasses support for small-scale infrastructure for community needs. The Programme will include criteria to seek and ensure that such infrastructure is in line with the principle of environmental sustainability.

In addition, interventions to be financed under the Programme shall be implemented in accordance with national legislations on environmental protection.

Environmental laws of Latvia and Lithuania are based on the EU directives, such the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) (comprising Natura 2000 framework of protected areas for preserving the endangered habitats and species in the EU), the Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC), the Flood Directive (2007/60/EC), the Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC), the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive (2008/1/EC) as well as Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species, etc.

In the case of Belarus, the main documents on environmental protection and use of natural resources are the National Strategy for Sustainable Social-Economic Development of Belarus for the Period up to 2020 (2004), Major Directions of Social-Economic Development of Belarus for 2006-2015 (2006), Programme of Social-Economic Development of Belarus for 2011-2015 (2011), and the Concept of the National Strategy of Sustainable Social and Economic Development for 2011-2025 (2009). Belarus has also amended or adopted special laws on environmental protection, such as “On Waste Management” (2000), “On State

Environmental Assessment” (2000), “On Environment Protection” (2002), “On Air Protection” (1997), “On Specially Protected Areas and Sites” (2000), “On Industrial Safety of Hazardous Industrial Facilities” (2001), etc.

In addition, the Programme will indirectly ensure the environmental sustainability during project selection process. The Programme authorities responsible for project selection shall choose to finance only those interventions that do not cause environmentally harmful effects.

### **3.4.2. Equal Opportunities and Non-discrimination**

According to ENI Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 232/2014), relationship between the EU and the partner countries under the ENI shall be based on, *inter alia*, cooperation and shared commitment to democracy and human rights.

The principle of democracy will be respected in both management and implementation of the Programme. Firstly, the composition and operational principles of the main decision-making body of the Programme, namely the Joint Monitoring Committee, will ensure the democratic management of the Programme. In particular, involvement of members from each participating country, representing institutions of different level; annually rotating chair; decision-making by consensus; unanimous adoption of the Rules of Procedure will be instrumental in achieving this aim. Secondly, the principles of human rights and non-discrimination will be directly promoted through interventions of *Priority 2.2. “Strengthening society”*. The latter are targeted at involving NGOs and local communities in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, in order to increase responsiveness and social accountability of authorities.

The Programme will promote during its implementation the idea of active participation, transparency, partnership and responsibility of various stakeholders.

With respect to this Programme, the most relevant of human rights is equal opportunities, implying the importance of having equal access to the benefits of the Programme for all groups of the society. Therefore, appropriate steps must be taken to prevent any discrimination on the basis of sex, race, ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation. Interventions to be financed under the Programme shall be implemented in accordance with national legislations on non-discrimination.

Non-discrimination laws of Latvia and Lithuania are based on the EU directives that were transposed into national legal system. Two EU directives especially relevant to the protection of equality and non-discrimination are the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) and the Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC). The former prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnic origin, covering the fields of employment and occupation, vocational training, membership of employer and employee organisations, social protection, including social security and health care, education and access to goods and services which are available to the public, including housing. The latter prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief, age, disability and sexual orientation, encompassing the fields of employment and occupation, vocational training and membership in employers’ and

employees' organisations. These directives set out minimum requirements, ensuring effective legal protection against discrimination in the whole EU.

In the case of Belarus, Article 22 of the Constitution stipulates the principle of equality before the law, provides the right to equal protection of rights and legitimate interests without any discrimination. This right is accorded to all citizens, irrespective of their origin, racial, ethnic or civil affiliation, social status, gender, language, education, and attitude towards religion, place of residence, state of health or other circumstances. Even though there is no specific antidiscrimination legislation, the prohibition of discrimination and the principle of equality of citizens before the law are set out in the legislation regulating the enjoyment of rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural and other areas of public life, including the Labour Code, the Marriage and Family Code, the Education Code, the Civil Code, etc. Laws, such as the Social Welfare of Disabled Persons Act, the Prevention of Disability and Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act, the Ethnic Minorities Act, and the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations Act, secure the rights of the most vulnerable groups, including ethnic and religious minorities, and the disabled.

Safeguarding equal opportunities is especially relevant with regard to the vulnerable groups. Among the latter children, women, physically or mentally disabled, elderly, minorities, ex-cons, those struggling with substance abuse, homeless, long-term unemployed, etc. might be included. People belonging to vulnerable groups are targeted under *Priority 1.1. "Enhancing the access to social and other services for vulnerable groups"*. It is important to note that the vulnerability of certain groups depends on the context of particular country/region.

According to the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the Programme should indicate ways of mainstreaming HIV/AIDS as an important cross-cutting issue. Within its duration, the Programme will focus on awareness-raising on health issues, in particular focusing on promotion of healthy lifestyle and tackling different health-related risks (HIV/AIDS, among others).

In addition, the principle of non-discrimination will be indirectly ensured during project selection process. Programme authorities responsible for project selection shall choose to finance only those interventions that are non-discriminatory.

### **3.4.3. Gender Equality**

Equality between women and men is one of the fundamental principles of Community law under Article 2 and Article 3 (2) of the Treaty on the European Union. These provisions proclaim equality between men and women as a 'task' and an 'aim' of the Union and impose a positive obligation to promote it in all its activities. The EU objectives on gender equality are to ensure equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women and to combat any form of discrimination on the grounds of gender. The principle of gender equality is relevant for all priorities of the Programme. Women might be distinguished as one of vulnerable groups targeted by the interventions of *Priority 1.1. "Enhancing the access to social and*

*other services for vulnerable groups*”. The interventions to be financed under the Programme shall be carried out in accordance with national legislations on gender equality.

Gender equality laws of Latvia and Lithuania are based on the EU directives that were transposed into national law system. There are numerous EU directives with regard to pursuing equality between men and women (namely 2006/54/EC, 79/7/EEC, 2010/41/EU, 92/85/EEC, 2010/18/EU, 2004/113/EC). As one of the fundamental directives, the Equal Treatment Directive (2006/54/EC) on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation, might be distinguished. It consolidates a number of previous directives in this area, notably, the Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions, which was amended by the Directive 2002/73/EC. Some other EU directives, such as the Directive 75/117/ EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women, and the Directive 97/80/EC on the burden of proof in the cases of discrimination based on sex, also encompass provisions which have as their purpose the implementation of the principle of equal treatment between men and women.

In the case of Belarus, the main document designed to ensure the equal participation of men and women in all spheres of life is the 4th National Plan of Actions to Ensure Gender Equality in the Republic of Belarus for 2011-2015 (2011), covering the following areas: ensuring equal socioeconomic rights; ensuring equal access to social protection and healthcare; development of the system of gender education; information support to the interventions focused on ensuring gender equality; prevention of human trafficking and gender-based violence; awareness raising on gender issues, etc. Even though there are no specific laws on gender equality or any separate anti-discrimination legislation covering sex- and gender-based discrimination, provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex are incorporated in a number of laws. Belarusian laws provide for equal treatment of women with regards to property ownership and inheritance, family law, and the judicial system, requirements for equal wages for equal work. Some legislative reforms in support of the goal of gender equality have been undertaken in order to conform to international standards, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

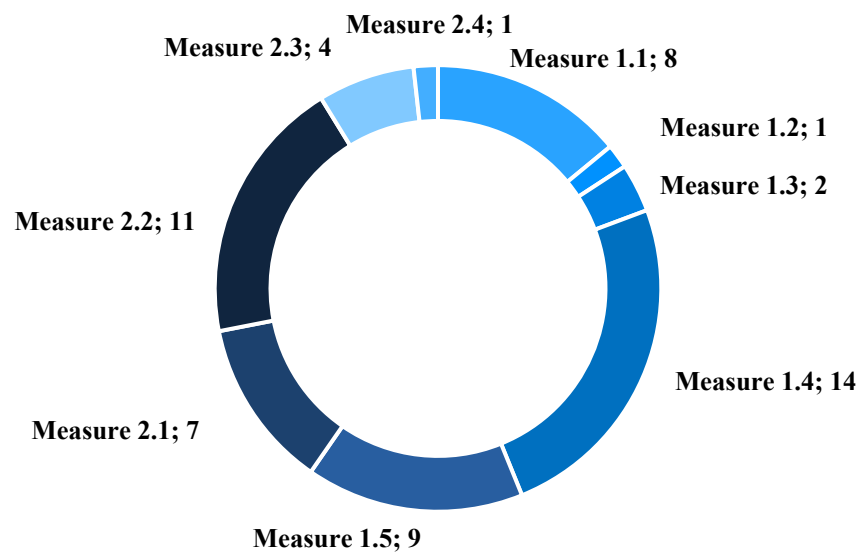
In addition, the principle of gender equality will be indirectly ensured during project selection process. Programme authorities responsible for project selection shall choose to finance only those interventions that do not have direct negative impact on gender equality.

### **3.5. Lessons Learnt from the Previous Programme**

In the case of Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ENPI CBC Programme 2007-2013 (*hereinafter - the previous Programme*), interventions were implemented in the following 9 areas:

- **Measure 1.1:** Promotion of socioeconomic development and encouragement of business and entrepreneurship;
- **Measure 1.2:** Enhancement of local and regional strategic development and planning;
- **Measure 1.3:** Improvement of cross-border accessibility through the development of transport and communication networks and related services;
- **Measure 1.4:** Preservation and promotion of cultural and historical heritage, promotion of cross-border tourism;
- **Measure 1.5:** Strengthening of social-cultural networking and community development;
- **Measure 2.1:** Protection of environmental and natural resources;
- **Measure 2.2:** Enhancement of education, health and social sphere development;
- **Measure 2.3:** Improvement of infrastructure and equipment related to the border crossing points;
- **Measure 2.4:** Improvement of border management operations and customs procedures.

In total, 57 projects have been implemented or are still being implemented under the previous Programme. The distribution of projects by measures is provided in the figure below.



*Figure 2. Distribution of projects implementing different measures under the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus ENPI CBC Programme 2007-2013*

The majority of the projects carried out under the previous Programme implemented measures 1.4 (14 projects) and 2.2 (11 projects), demonstrating the highest demand for cross-border activities in the fields of:

- Cultural and historical heritage, and tourism;

- Education, health and social sphere development.

Slightly smaller but still considerable share of the projects implemented measures 1.5 (9), 1.1 (8) and 2.1 (7) in the fields of:

- Social-cultural networking and community development;
- Socioeconomic development, business and entrepreneurship;
- Environmental and natural resources.

Relatively less projects implemented measures 2.3 (4 projects), 1.3 (2 projects), 2.4 (1 project) and 1.2 (1 project). In the case of measures 2.3 and 2.4 related to border management and border-crossing, small number of projects can be justified by the nature of activities supported (mostly large-scale and infrastructure-related). However, small numbers of projects implementing measures 1.2 and 1.3 shows low demand for activities in the fields of:

- Local and regional strategic development and planning;
- Transport and communication networks.

Similar conclusions might be drawn from the analysis of the achievements of result and output indicators, summarized in the table below.

	Measures								
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4
<b>Achievement of result indicators, %</b>	114	20	50	93	35	117	92	200	50
<b>Achievement of output indicators, %</b>	43-100	20-39	0-50	40-333	263-333	0-50	0-25	0	0

*Table 4. The achievement level of result and output indicators as of the end of 2014*

Taking into account that part of the projects carried out under the previous Programme are not completed yet, planned values of the majority of the indicators (both result and output) are likely to be achieved and even exceeded. However, in the cases of measures 1.2 and 1.3, relatively lower achievements are more likely, since the projects implementing the latter were less popular among the applicants. Rather low interest in actions to be supported under the above-mentioned measures might be explained by the limited Programme funding, nature of project selection procedures (assessment of small-scale projects was not separate from that of regular projects), as well limited capacities of NGOs to submit project applications. Furthermore, the strategy of the previous Programme was not focused enough. In contrast, the current Programme encompasses only 6 fields of interventions. It is expected that limited thematic scope will contribute to the stronger concentration on the most important issues and allow for better coordination and synergies with other programmes.

With regard to the interventions to be implemented under the current Programme, the following lessons learnt from the previous Programme are relevant:



- **Regarding Priority 1.1. “Enhancing the access to social and other services for vulnerable groups”**: around 9 per cent of the projects (amounting to 6 per cent of the total funding) financed under the previous Programme targeted improvement of social and other services for vulnerable groups.
- **Regarding Priority 1.2. “Stimulating employment through entrepreneurship and innovations”**: around 7 per cent of the projects (amounting to 2 per cent of the total funding) financed under the previous Programme encompassed actions related to employment and entrepreneurship. Half of them were targeted at youth.
- **Regarding Priority 2.1. “Increasing capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges”**: around 4 per cent of projects (amounting to almost 11 per cent of the total funding) financed under the previous Programme were targeted at capacities of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges.
- **Regarding Priority 2.2. “Strengthening society”**: 25 per cent of projects (amounting to around 19 per cent of the total funding) financed under the previous Programme encompassed various actions aimed at strengthening society in the Programme area. The main actors engaged in these actions were governmental (especially, municipal) institutions.
- **Regarding Priority 3.1. “Promoting and preserving cultural and historical heritage and traditional skills”**: almost 28 per cent of the projects (amounting to around 27 per cent of the total funding) implemented under the previous Programme were targeted at promotion and protection of cultural and historical heritage.
- **Regarding Priority 4.1 “Enhancing border-crossing efficiency”**: 11 per cent of the projects (amounting to 25 per cent of the total funding) implemented under the previous Programme were targeted at improvement of border-crossing facilities.

Taking into account lessons learned from the previous Programme, it might be concluded that priorities chosen under the current Programme are appropriate for several reasons. Firstly, some fields (cultural and historical heritage, and border crossing) were allocated relatively large investments under the previous Programme. However, they were either highly popular among applicants (demonstrating high demand) or have a strategic importance, deeming continuous investments in these fields justifiable. Secondly, other fields (strengthening society and employment) were partly covered in the interventions from the previous Programme. Nevertheless, some remaining investment gaps (for example, engagement of non-governmental actors in cross-border cooperation and increasing employability of specific age groups) are foreseen to be filled by the interventions carried out under the current Programme. Thirdly, the rest of the fields (social sphere development and tackling of common challenges) represent perpetual needs of the society, thus, require continuous attention and investments.

For the assessment of the successful practices and problematic cases in the previous Programme and the lessons to be learned for current Programme, the conclusions of the

experts of Result Oriented Monitoring (ROM) mission, contracted by the European Commission to carry evaluation of the implementation of the Programme, can be relevant.

The latest ROM monitoring mission for the previous Programme was carried on 10–21 November 2014. The experts indicated the relevance of the previous Programme to the needs of the involved target areas and issues of common concern in the cross-border region. The efficiency of the Programme was considered problematic due to delays in actions' implementation. Experts noted the good quality of formed partnerships and networks with potential for sustainability emerging. As well it was noted that the established CBC cooperation was highly valued by the Lithuanian, Latvian and Belarusian partners and there was a high level of ownership both on Programme and project level. The prospects for impact and potential for sustainability were considered good, confirmed by the maintenance of the trilateral Programme profile for the current Programme.

The main recommendations were related to mobilisation of resources for timely implementation and finalisation of the actions; increase of role of Branch Office in Belarus in assisting the beneficiaries; focus on clear objectives for the future Programme as well efforts of Belarusian national authorities in shortening the projects' validation processes on the side of Belarus.

Thus, it can be concluded that the Programme relevance and sustainability of results was estimated as high. There is real demand for continued trilateral cooperation. The main problems and potential risks were related to the extended projects approval procedures by the Programme management bodies and lack of readiness of partners to timely implement the projects. In this regard the current Programme has taken steps to shorten the projects approval procedures, i.e. the decisions on projects' approval will be taken by JMC, instead of Project Selection Committee and JMC both being involved; the possibilities for faster approval of projects in Belarus will be considered with the Belarusian National Authorities.

As well the capacities and project management experience, knowledge of Programme rules by partners, especially on Belarusian side, were insufficient thus resulting in mistakes and delays in procurement procedures and reporting. Moreover, the quality of verification of expenditures carried by the external auditors was not always sufficient. For more efficient implementation, the JTS/JMA and BOs role in information and monitoring activities for the projects will be strengthened. The quality of expenditure verification shall be strengthened by the established Audit Authority and Group of Auditors.

In regard to projects' preparation, the stricter requirements shall be set for preparation of applications, including requirements to submit full technical documentation for construction works together with the applications; requirements for strong partnerships and elaborated project plans and budgets; thus ensuring that project partners could start projects' implementation immediately after signing of the grant contracts and relevant national approval procedures in Belarus.

### 3.6. Risks and Mitigating Measures

On the basis of experience in implementing cross-border cooperation activities in 2007-2013, the following main types of risks associated with the implementation of the cross-border cooperation concept were identified:

- The partners' capacity and preparedness to enter into a Programme partnership (political commitment);
- The partners' willingness and capacity to manage the Programme, and notably to establish a system of joint management responsibility;
- The partners' knowledge and capacity to develop and implement project proposals;
- The national level's support to the establishment and management of the Programme by local partners<sup>51</sup>.

However, in the framework of this Programme, more specific risks should be considered. In the table below relevant risks on both programme and project levels, as well as environmental risks, along with the respective mitigating measures, are listed.

*Table 5. Risks and corresponding mitigating measures*

RISK	MITIGATING MEASURE
<b>PROGRAMME LEVEL RISKS</b>	
<b>Insufficient demand for interventions financed under the selected priorities</b>	Selection of thematic objectives and priorities of the Programme was based on the comprehensive analysis of the social-economic situation of the Programme area, results of the survey of regional and local authorities operating in the Programme area, as well as consensus among representatives of the participating countries in the meetings of the Programming Task Force. Thus, the priorities selected are in accordance with the actual needs felt in the Programme area. However, in order to increase awareness of the possibility to carry out interventions financed under the Programme, different visibility measures (see the subsection 9.6.) will be implemented.
<b>Double financing</b>	In order to avoid financing of the same interventions under the Programme and national programmes, specific measures (see the subsection 10.1.) have been foreseen.
<b>Lack of progress in implementing the Programme</b>	In order to ensure smooth implementation of the Programme and, consequently, achievement of its objectives, continuous monitoring of the Programme will be carried out. Project beneficiaries will be obliged to regularly submit project progress reports, indicating achievement of outputs and results set in grant contracts.
<b>PROJECT LEVEL RISKS</b>	
<b>Challenges in starting cooperation (finding project partners)</b>	Possible difficulties in finding project partners from other countries of the Programme will be eliminated by organization of partner search events and other relevant informational activities.

<sup>51</sup> ENPI Cross-Border Cooperation Multi-annual Indicative Programme 2011-2013.

<b>Insufficient capacities of project beneficiaries to implement the projects</b>	Operational assistance regarding implementation of the projects will be provided to project beneficiaries on <i>ad hoc</i> basis.
<b>Administrative burden for project beneficiaries</b>	In order to avoid extra administrative burden for project beneficiaries, electronic forms and electronic data exchange will be used in management of the projects, where possible.
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS</b>	
<b>General environmental risks of supported actions of soft measures and LIPs</b>	<p>All projects and activities shall have appropriate solutions for avoiding, minimising and proper management of waste and wastewater.</p> <p>Environmental requirements shall be followed as it is foreseen in EU and national legislation. Required environmental permits or documentation (if applicable) shall be requested with the application for project financing or before issuing construction permit.</p> <p>The Programme should be monitored at least once during the programming period and a monitoring report of Programme's activities should be planned in 2019 to recognize the direct or indirect effects on the environment within the implementation of the Programme.</p>
<b>Regarding the aspect the supported projects of small - scale infrastructure</b>	If applicable, it is recommended to include environmental/ sustainability criteria among other project's selection criteria for financing. Simple quantitative criteria shall be created in order to compare the applications from sustainability point of view.
<b>The development of joint initiatives in utilisation and promotion of cultural and historical heritage objects, encompassing organisation of joint festivals, fairs, art exhibitions, etc. could have negative impact in case it is implemented in the environmentally sensitive areas, mostly to the biodiversity, water and air (transport). Historic building renovation, might also have negative impact to biodiversity, many of the old buildings, especially churches, also serves as a bat shelter space.</b>	<p>Environmental requirements shall be followed as it is foreseen in EU and national legislation. Required environmental permits or documentation (if applicable) shall be requested with the application for project financing or before issuing construction permit.</p> <p>Before planning activities in NATURA 2000 areas, it is recommended projects to consult national authority responsible for NATURA 2000 protection. If necessary special prevention measures for biodiversity shall be applied on case by case basis.</p>
<b>Some LIPs depending on the scope can be a subject of EIA procedures (parking lots, reconstruction of road, etc.).</b>	<p>In this case detailed environmental impact assessment should be executed before the project implementation with the aim to prevent the negative impact to environment. Such projects will include public consultation according to EU EIA Directive. Environmental requirements shall be followed as it is foreseen in EU and national legislation. Required environmental permits or documentation (if applicable) shall be requested with the application for project financing or before issuing construction permit.</p> <p>It is recommended to perform monitoring on site after completing any kind of infrastructure constructions works (for example LIP), especially in the environmentally sensitive territories such as protected areas or Natura 2000 sites.</p>

## 4. CONTRIBUTION TO MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES

The main macro-regional strategy relevant for the Programme is the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (*hereinafter - the EUSBSR*) adopted by the European Council in 2009. It is the first macro-regional strategy in Europe, aiming at reinforcing cooperation in implementing EU policy within the Baltic Sea region, and, thus, allowing to achieve a sustainable environment, as well as optimal economic and social development in the region. The EUSBSR applies to the entire area surrounding the Baltic Sea, including 8 EU Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden) and 3 non-EU countries (Norway, Russia and Belarus). The EUSBSR does not impose any action to non-EU countries but rather indicates areas where cooperation is desirable and proposes platforms for cooperation. Therefore, in order to address common challenges, cooperation with non-EU countries – Norway, Russia and Belarus also takes place.

The EUSBSR intends to fulfil three objectives and their respective sub-objectives: (1) saving the sea (clear water in the sea, rich and healthy wildlife, clean and safe shipping, and better cooperation), (2) connecting the region (good transport conditions, reliable energy markets, connecting people in the region, and better cooperation in fighting cross-border crime), and (3) increasing prosperity (Baltic Sea Region as a frontrunner for deepening and fulfilling the single market, EUSBSR contributing to the implementation of Europe 2020 Strategy, improved global competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region, as well as climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management). The revised EUSBSR Action Plan comprises 13 policy areas and 4 horizontal actions (along with detailed actions and flagships) to be implemented by the stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region<sup>52</sup>.

In the light of priorities of the Programme, the most relevant policy areas (*hereinafter - PA*) and horizontal actions (*hereinafter - HA*) of the EUSBSR are PA Health “Improving and promoting people’s health, including its social aspects” (in line with Priority 1.1. “Enhancing the access to social and other services for vulnerable groups”), PA Education “Education, research and employability”, PA Innovation “Exploiting the full potential of the region in research, innovation and SME, utilising the Digital Single Market as a source for attracting talents and investments (in line with Priority 1.2. “Stimulating employment through entrepreneurship and innovations”), PA Hazards “Reducing the use and impact of hazardous substances”, PA Secure “Protection from land-based emergencies, accidents and cross-border crime”, HA Neighbours “Creating added value to the Baltic Sea cooperation by working with neighbouring countries and regions” (in line with Priority 2.1. “Increasing capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges”), and PA Culture “Culture & creative sectors” (in line with Priority 3.1. “Promoting and preserving cultural and historical heritage and traditional skills”).

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<sup>52</sup> Action Plan, Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 10.9.2015 SWD(2015) 177

The strategy does not have its own financing, but helps to mobilize all the existing EU instruments and funds, as well as other financing sources. Therefore, actions contributing to the implementation of the EUSBSR might be supported under different operational programmes. This Programme shall also contribute to the efforts aimed at developing the Baltic Sea Region, since all participating countries are part of it. Therefore, where it is appropriate, actions relevant for the EUSBSR shall be implemented within the framework of this Programme. In particular, the Programme could contribute to the implementation of the EUSBSR through projects carried out in the areas relevant to the strategy (identified in the EUSBSR Action Plan). In order to assess the degree of contribution of the Programme's projects to the EUSBSR, a requirement to explain the ways (if any) in which a project might contribute to the implementation of the strategy shall be included in the project application form.

Where appropriate, activities with relevance for the Strategy shall be coordinated via National Authorities.

The Joint Monitoring Committee during the selection process may consider, if deemed necessary and agreed among JMC members, in case of equal scoring to give priority to the projects contributing to the EUSBSR.

The Ministry of Interior, acting as the Managing Authority of the Programme, is involved in coordination of EUSBSR processes in Lithuania and therefore the related activities, where it is appropriate, will be discussed in the Programme bodies using the existing structures and procedures.

The Programme shall also contribute to the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus until year 2020. The latter aims, among other issues, at boosting regional development through international cooperation. In particular, Article 5.7 of the Strategy outlines the necessity to strengthen participation of Belarus and its regions in cross-border cooperation programmes of the Union, with emphasis on such priority areas as investment and entrepreneurship, enhancing local living standards, ensuring protection of the environment, fostering cross-cultural dialogue, etc.

## 5. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

### *The Procedure of the SEA*

According to Article 3(2) of the Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment adopted by the Council of the European Union on 27 June 2001 (*hereinafter - SEA Directive*), a Strategic Environmental Assessment (*hereinafter - SEA*) is mandatory for all types of programmes “which are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use and which set the framework for future development consent for projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 2011/92/EU” (EIA Directive); or which in view of their likely effects on NATURA 2000 sites have been determined to require an assessment pursuant to Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

The Programme includes Large Infrastructure Projects which are covered under EIA Directive 2011/92/EU and may have environmental effects; therefore in accordance with the provisions of Article 3, SEA procedures are applicable for the Programme. SEA process has been implemented in parallel with the Programme preparation in line with the requirement of SEA Directive and national SEA legislations of Programme Members.

The aim of the SEA Report was to identify and present the likely significant effects on the environment and to integrate environmental considerations into preparation and adoption of the Programme.

The SEA Report includes the description of the territories which can be significantly affected and their likely evolution thereof without implementation of the Programme; likely significant effects on the environment; monitoring and recommendations.

The environmental assessment was carried out considering 8 environmental aspects: biodiversity, fauna and flora, population and human health, soil, water, air and climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage, landscape.

An environmental assessment according to the SEA Directive involves the following steps:

- scoping of SEA and preparation of SEA report;
- consultations with competent authorities and the public;
- inclusion of environmental report conclusions and consultation results in the Programme;
- monitoring and recommendations;
- informing consulted authorities and the public about the programme approval.

The Scoping Report has been prepared and consulted with the public and competent authorities in Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus in 2014. SEA Report was presented for consultations with the public and competent authorities in spring 2015.

### ***Non-technical Summary of the SEA***

The SEA Report concludes that complex investigation of the TO as well as proposed LIPs shows that the Programme has no negative impact on environmental aspects investigated by the SEA process. Regarding the protected areas and other environmental aspects, the significant negative effects implementing the Programme are doubtful, in general it is insignificant or positive in short and long-term. Therefore, impact prevention, reduction measures for significant adverse effects are not proposed. A potential wider environmental effect is described as positive, due preservation and adaptation of cultural heritage, enhancing the capacity of security and safety in the region. The border-crossing efficiency should result the reduction of time spent in cross-border point which cause positive effect on air quality in relation to traffic and transport emissions reductions. As well positive impact from the perspective of energy saving is expected due to infrastructure and some buildings modernisation.

The SEA Report provided recommendations to avoid negative impacts and to achieve environmentally friendly and sustainable Programme implementation.

Recommendation that environmental requirements shall be followed as it is foreseen in EU and national legislation and the required environmental permits or documentation (if applicable) shall be requested with the application for project financing or before issuing construction permit will be implemented in the Call for Proposals documentation. Also depending on the scope some of LIP can be a subject of EIA procedures (parking lots, reconstruction of roads, etc.). In this case detailed environmental assessment will be required before the project implementation with the aim to prevent the negative impact to environment.

Before planning activities in NATURA 2000 areas, it is recommended that projects consult national authority responsible for NATURA 2000 protection. If necessary special prevention measures for biodiversity shall be applied on case by case basis.

The Programme foresees support for cultural heritage preservation and conservation. SEA report recommended involving natural heritage as well. However it was decided to concentrate the investments into cultural heritage, therefore the preservation and conservation of natural heritage can be only as complement to the main investments foreseen into cultural heritage.

The SEA also paid attention to the need that all projects and activities shall have appropriate solutions for avoiding, minimising and proper management of waste and wastewater. This proposal will be communicated to the potential applicants.

Following SEA recommendations, where applicable, environmental / sustainability criteria will be included among other project's selection criteria for financing. The Programme takes into account publicity, community awareness of the planned activities, community involvement.

The SEA Report recommends that the Programme should be monitored at least once during the programming period and a monitoring report of programme's activities should be planned



in 2019 to recognize the direct or indirect effects on the environment within the implementation of the Programme. The Programme authorities foresee the Mid-term evaluation of the Programme in year 2019 provisionally.

### ***Consultations with the Public and the Competent Authorities***

Following the Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, the SEA report was made available to the public. Public information procedures were held in each country separately following national legislation during the year 2014-2015. The SEA procedures were carried in accordance to the national legal acts. The summaries of the SEA Report were published in national languages and were available on the Programme website.

In Latvia, information about public meeting and SEA report was made available to the public in the websites of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia, Latgale Planning Region, Zemgale Planning Region, the Environment State Bureau, and in the official newsletter “Latvijas Vēstnesis”. Consequently, public meeting in Rezekne City Council, where draft of the Programme and SEA report were presented, was organised. No comments from the public were received for SEA report. Furthermore, the SEA report was presented to the competent authorities in Latvia. Latgale Planning Region and the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia had no comments, while the State Environmental Service, Madonas regional environmental board, the State Environmental Service and the Nature Conservation Agency provided comments for the report.

In Lithuania, information that SEA procedures have been started was announced in the regional and national newspapers (“Alytaus naujienos”, “Gimtasis Rokiškis”, “Kauno diena”, “Panevėžio balsas”, “Utenos apskrities žinios”, “Vilniaus krašto savaitraštis” and “Lietuvos žinios”), and the official website of the Programme (<http://enpi-cbc.eu>). Consequently, information about public meeting and SEA report was made available in the official website of the Programme (<http://enpi-cbc.eu>), websites of 36 municipalities in the Programme area and in the national newspaper “Lietuvos žinios”. Afterwards, public meeting in the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, where draft of the Programme and SEA report were presented, was organised. In addition, the SEA report was presented to the competent authorities in Lithuania. The Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania and the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania had no comments, while the State Service for Protected Areas under the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania provided comments for the report.

The Republic of Belarus is a party of ESPOO convention but has not ratified the SEA protocol. SEA scoping report and SEA report was provided to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. The authorities have expressed no objections/comments on the SEA documentation. During the PTF meetings no amendments

to the SEA report were initiated and it was considered acceptable. No comments from the public were received. The legislation of the Republic of Belarus does not contain any provisions on obligatory public environmental assessment of technical assistance programmes, hence, the Ministry of Environment has no obligation to launch the public consultations on the matter.

The main regulating act of the Belarusian legislation in the field of environmental protection is the Law on State Ecological Expertise of 9 November 2009, which defines the object of obligatory environmental impact assessment and relevant procedures for such assessment to be carried out, including involvement of the public.

According to the mentioned Law on State Ecological Expertise, such obligatory environmental impact assessment is usually done in cases related to construction works and involves public consultations.

In each case where the project approved within the Programme would envisage construction works, in Belarus such environmental impact assessment will be done separately on a case-by-case basis as stipulated in the Law on State Ecological Expertise. The environmental impact assessment has to be done on a basis of concrete technical documents related to the construction works.

## 6. DESCRIPTION OF THE THEMATIC OBJECTIVES

### 6.1. Thematic Objective 1 “Promotion of Social Inclusion and Fight against Poverty”

#### 6.1.1. Priority 1.1. “Enhancing the Access to Social and Other Services for Vulnerable Groups”

*Specific objective* - developing new and/or improving the existent social or other services for vulnerable groups through cross-border cooperation.

#### Expected results by the Priority

Activities financed under this Priority could result in numerous positive short-term, mid-term and long-term changes in the Programme area. The most important of these include, first of all, emergence of alternative social and other service providers (including NGOs and local communities) cooperating with cross-border partners and, thus, increased diversification of service providers; secondly, increased availability and wider variety of social and other services for vulnerable groups, including higher availability/accessibility of non-residential social and other services, in addition, increased capacities and gains in experience of NGOs operating in the Programme area; finally, reduction of social exclusion and increase in the quality of life of residents of the Programme area.

*Table 6. Programme result Indicators (Priority 1.1.)*

Indicator	Measurement Unit	Baseline Value	Baseline Year	Target Value (2022)	Source of Data
Number of new/improved and/or more accessible social or other services for vulnerable groups in the Programme area	Services	6	2013	14	Project reports

#### Actions to be supported under the Priority

Actions to be supported under this Priority shall directly increase accessibility to basic social and other services for vulnerable groups in the Programme area. The first priority of the support should be provision of the new/improved and/or more accessible social or other services for vulnerable groups. However, if lack of infrastructure is recognised and proved to

be serious obstacle to the development of services, investments in small-scale infrastructure may be financed.

The desired result of the support is increased variety, accessibility and/or quality of social and other services in the Programme area, as well as more active involvement of local, non-traditional service providers.

*Indicative list of actions to be supported:*

- Development and provision of social and other services for vulnerable groups;
- Development of regional/local programmes encouraging new/non-traditional actors to involve in the provision of social and other services for vulnerable groups;
- Applying innovative solutions, including technological, for provision of social and other services for vulnerable groups;
- Promotion of healthy lifestyle;
- Capacity building and exchange of good practice;
- Acquisition of equipment necessary for providing social and other services for vulnerable groups;
- Development of small-scale infrastructure necessary for provision of social and other services for vulnerable groups.

**The guiding principles for the selection of projects (in addition to the Section 9.2)**

Each project, which includes the development of small-scale infrastructure and/or acquisition of equipment, shall encompass soft measures aimed directly at the target groups.

**The planned use of large infrastructure projects:**

The Large infrastructure project (*hereinafter - LIP*) “Creation of Modern Ethnocultural Environment in Vilnius Pranciškus Skorina Gymnasium and Lida State Secondary School No. 4” (Lithuania-Belarus) shall be implemented under this Priority

*Table 7. Large infrastructure project (LIP) to be implemented under the Priority 1.1.*

Title of the Project	Creation of Modern Ethnocultural Environment in Vilnius Pranciškus Skorina Gymnasium and Lida State Secondary School No. 4
<b>Beneficiary</b>	Vilnius Pranciškus Skorina Gymnasium, Lithuania
<b>Partner(s)</b>	Lida State Secondary School No. 4, Belarus
<b>Main activities</b>	<i>Activities:</i>

<b>and expected results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reconstruction of building of Vilnius Pranciškus Skorina Gymnasium and equipment with modern training facilities, leading to high-quality educational services satisfying social needs and meeting the EU requirements;</li> <li>- Construction of a new Vilnius Pranciškus Skorina Gymnasium sports hall;</li> <li>- Necessary facilities and equipment acquired;</li> <li>- Reconstruction of Lida State Secondary School No. 4 conference hall, sports hall and classrooms equipping with modern equipment for teaching chemistry and physics;</li> <li>- Soft activities implementation.</li> </ul> <p><i>Results:</i></p> <p>Improved learning conditions in Vilnius Pranciskus Skorina Gymnasium and Lida State Secondary School No. 4.</p>
<b>Justification for direct award</b>	Both schools are the only ones in each country providing secondary education for Lithuanian minority in Lida and as well Belarusian minority in Vilnius.
<b>Estimated budget (MEUR)</b>	2.78
<b>Programme's estimated contribution (MEUR)</b>	2.5 (minimum amount to be allocated for infrastructure)

*Table 8. Programme output indicators (Priority 1.1.)*

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2022)	Source of data
Number of organisations cooperating in the field of new/improved and/or more accessible social and other services for vulnerable groups in the Programme area	Organisations	30	Project reports
Number of social service professionals participating in cross-border exchanges or activities.	Persons	40	Project reports

### 6.1.2. Priority 1.2. “Stimulating Employment through Entrepreneurship and Innovations”

*Specific objective* - developing employability and entrepreneurial capacities of people, especially young and pre-retirement age, through cross-border cooperation and exchange of good practices.

#### Expected results by the Priority

Activities financed under this Priority could result in numerous positive short-term, mid-term and long-term changes in the Programme area. The most important of these include, first of all, increased interaction and resource sharing between educational institutions (schools, universities, vocational training institutions), business support institutions and local labour market (entrepreneurs); secondly, increased cooperation and efforts of actors from the participating countries operating in the field of employment; furthermore, introduction of alternative approaches to the solution of unemployment problem (particularly in the case of young and pre-retirement age people), as well as improved system of vocational and professional training in conformity with the labour market needs; finally, increased entrepreneurial skills, enhanced human capital, employability and, consequently, decreased unemployment in the region.

*Table 9. Programme result indicators (Priority 1.2.)*

Indicator	Measurement Unit	Baseline Value	Baseline Year	Target Value (2022)	Source of Data
Number of people in the Programme area who have received support in developing their employability and entrepreneurial capacities, of whom: - youth; - pre-retirement age people; - other.	Persons	Total number of people - 1400, youth - 400	2013	Total number of people - 1500, youth - 700, pre-retirement age people - 300, other - 500	Project reports

### **Actions to be supported under the Priority**

Actions to be supported under this Priority shall target people facing unemployment in the Programme area paying special attention to the unemployment of young (15-29 years old) and pre-retirement age (55-64 years old in the EU member states, 50-59 years old in Belarus) people.

#### *Indicative list of actions to be supported:*

- Preparation and implementation of programmes promoting and/or facilitating employment;
- Preparation and implementation of programmes promoting and/or facilitating business activities;
- Promotion of new/innovative business development and employment methods;
- Promotion and implementation of cooperation between business and educational institutions, including apprenticeship initiatives;
- Development of entrepreneurial skills, including business idea generation, business planning, product and service development, business management, sales and marketing, etc.;
- Development of skills corresponding to the needs of labour market in particular region;
- Promotion of cross-border entrepreneurship;
- Strengthening capacities of public business support institutions;
- Preparation and implementation of programmes promoting exchange of experience among different age groups;
- Acquisition of equipment necessary for the implementation of initiatives promoting and/or facilitating employment.

### **The guiding principles for the selection of projects (in addition to the Section 9.2)**

Each project, which includes acquisition of equipment, shall encompass soft measures aimed directly at the target groups.

### **The planned use of large infrastructure projects**

There are no large infrastructure projects planned.

Table 10. Programme output indicators (Priority 1.2.)

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2022)	Source of data
Number of implemented cross-border initiatives aimed at developing employability and/or entrepreneurial capacities of people, including youth and pre-retirement age people, in the Programme area	Initiatives	20	Project reports

## 6.2. Thematic Objective 2 “Support to Local and Regional Good Governance”

### 6.2.1. Priority 2.1. “Increasing Capacity of Local and Regional Authorities to tackle Common Challenges”

*Specific objective* - increasing cross-border cooperation among authorities of the Programme area in dealing with natural and man-made disasters.

#### Expected results by the Priority

Activities financed under this Priority could result in numerous positive short-term, mid-term and long-term changes in the Programme area. The most important of these include, first of all, increased cooperation and experience-sharing among local and regional authorities of the participating countries in developing common systems and tools to manage natural resources, respond to various disasters and eliminate their consequences; secondly, increased cooperation of authorities from the participating countries in environmental, safety and security issues; fight with environmental pollution, including air and water pollution; furthermore, improved policy management and the quality of public services in the fields of environmental protection, safety and security; finally, enhanced capacities of local and regional authorities of the participating countries in tackling common challenges.

At the individual level capacity building shall be based on processes of learning, knowledge and experience sharing and other learning techniques. At the organisational level local and regional institutions shall encourage positive changes within their systems, procedures, regulations. In order to facilitate institutional performance and increase public service quality, development and implementation of particular tools (e-governance, data exchange systems, specific equipment, etc.) shall be supported.



*Table 11. Programme result indicators (Priority 2.1.)*

Indicator	Measurement Unit	Baseline Value	Baseline Year	Target Value (2022)	Source of Data
Number of institutions involved in joint decision making process with regards to the common challenges	Institutions	16	2013	25	Project reports

### **Actions to be supported under the Priority**

In order to tackle common environmental, safety and security challenges, the Programme shall fund development and implementation by at least two of the participating countries of cooperation programmes establishing an agreement to cooperate in particular field. Under this Priority regional and local authorities, as well as other public bodies acting in the fields of nature and environment management, safety and security shall improve their skills and capacities to deal with natural and man-made disasters, and to ensure safety and security in the region. All the actions shall be implemented in close cooperation between neighbouring countries.

#### *Indicative list of actions to be supported:*

- Promotion of legal and administrative cooperation between authorities and institutions of the participating countries in the fields of nature and environment management, environmental pollution, safety and security, management of spread of invasive alien species;
- Acquisition of specific equipment and improvement of infrastructure, technical capacities and methods to tackle natural and man-made disasters;
- Development and implementation of training initiatives, strengthening capacities to deal with natural and man-made disasters, and to ensure safety and security;
- Increasing involvement of local communities in public decision-making and implementation processes in the fields of nature and environment management, environmental pollution; safety and security by raising public awareness.

### **The guiding principles for the selection of projects (in addition to the Section 9.2)**

Each project, which includes the development of small-scale infrastructure and/or acquisition of equipment, shall encompass soft measures aimed directly at the target groups.

### The planned use of large infrastructure projects

There are no large infrastructure projects planned.

*Table 12. Programme output indicators (Priority 2.1.)*

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2022)	Source of data
Number of cross-border cooperation initiatives involving joint/coordinated decision making in the sphere of tackling common challenges	Initiatives	10	Project reports

### 6.2.2. Priority 2.2. “Strengthening Society”

*Specific objective* - increasing cross-border cooperation among local non-governmental actors of the Programme area.

#### Expected results by the Priority

Activities financed under this Priority could result in numerous positive short-term, mid-term and long-term changes in the Programme area. The most important of these include, first of all, increased cooperation and participation of relevant local actors (NGOs, local communities) in local decision-making, implementation processes and local activities, secondly, more active and self-regulated communities, increased cooperation and experience-sharing within and among communities of the participating countries, moreover, enhanced capacities of local authorities and local non-governmental actors, furthermore, improved interconnections among local actors, gain in experience of local actors, finally, introduction of new community-led service models and social innovations (new products, services and models that simultaneously meet community needs) and more efficient governance solutions to local problems.

*Table 13. Programme result indicators (Priority 2.2.)*

Indicator	Measurement Unit	Baseline Value	Baseline Year	Target Value (2022)	Source of Data
Number of organisations that have established durable cross-border cooperation links	Organisations	140	2013	160	Project reports/ Evaluation reports

### **Actions to be supported under the Priority**

By this Priority the Programme shall support actions strengthening the links, on one hand, between local governments and local communities, and, on the other hand, among local communities of the Programme area in different fields, including culture, sports, education, etc.

#### *Indicative list of actions to be supported:*

- Preparation and implementation of initiatives increasing the participation of local communities in public decision making and implementation processes by developing various mechanisms (e.g. e-participation) that facilitate dialogue among local inhabitants and with local authorities);
- Implementation of training/mentoring activities for local communities in provision of community-led services;
- Development and implementation of community-led service provision initiatives;
- Transfer of good practices;
- Acquisition of equipment for community needs.

### **The guiding principles for the selection of projects (in addition to the Section 9.2)**

Each project, which includes the development of small-scale infrastructure and/or acquisition of equipment, shall encompass soft measures.

### **The planned use of large infrastructure projects:**

There are no large infrastructure projects planned.

*Table 14. Programme output indicators (Priority 2.2.)*

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2022)	Source of data
Number of implemented joint actions by non-governmental actors and other organizations of the Programme area in the fields of culture, sport, education, social services, etc.	Action	30	Project reports

### 6.3. Thematic Objective 3 “Promotion of Local Culture and Preservation of Historical Heritage”

#### 6.3.1. Priority 3.1. “Promoting and Preserving Cultural and Historical Heritage and Traditional Skills”

*Specific objective* - stimulating active and sustainable use of cultural and historical heritage through cross-border cooperation.

#### Expected results by the Priority

Activities financed under this Priority could result in numerous positive short-term, mid-term and long-term changes in the Programme area. The most important of these include, first of all, more sustainable and effective use of cultural and historical heritage; secondly, increased cultural vitality and attractiveness of the region; finally, increased tourist flows and increased economic growth in the region. Special attention has to be paid to enhancing human capital of local communities, strengthening regional identity and a sense of belonging. Encouraging local craftsmen and artists to use their traditional skills could stimulate the development of entrepreneurship in local communities and, in turn, increase attractiveness of the region and positively affect local economic activity.

*Table 15. Programme result indicators (Priority 3.1.)*

Indicator	Measurement Unit	Baseline Value	Baseline Year	Target Value (2022)	Source of Data
Number of tourists accommodated per 1000 population in the Programme area	Persons	329	2013	394	Official statistics

#### Actions to be supported under the Priority

By this Priority the Programme shall support common actions by the participating countries in utilisation and promotion of cultural and historical heritage. The latter shall be open for various community activities, as well as cultural, educational and tourism needs. Local inhabitants and tourists are both the main target groups, which shall benefit from the supported actions.

*Indicative list of actions to be supported:*

- Preservation and adaptation of cultural and historical heritage for cultural, educational and/or tourism purposes;
- Development of joint initiatives in utilisation and promotion of cultural and historical heritage objects, encompassing organisation of joint festivals, fairs, art exhibitions, etc.;
- Preservation and promotion of traditional production networks;
- Implementation of trainings for professionals working in in the fields of culture, cultural education, cultural and historical heritage and tourism;
- Promotion of cross-border cooperation and exchange of good practice among professionals working in in the fields of culture, cultural education, cultural and historical heritage and tourism;
- Acquisition of equipment necessary for organisation of initiatives aimed at utilisation and promotion of cultural and historical heritage (festivals, fairs, exhibitions, master classes, etc.);
- Development of infrastructure necessary for promotion of cultural and historical heritage in cultural and historical sites.

**The guiding principles for the selection of projects (in addition to the Section 9.2)**

Each project, which includes the development of small-scale infrastructure and/or acquisition of equipment, shall encompass soft measures.

**The planned use of large infrastructure projects**

There are no large infrastructure projects planned.

*Table 16. Programme output indicators (Priority 3.1.)*

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2022)	Source of data
Number of improved cultural and historical sites as a direct consequence of Programme support	Cultural and historical sites	15	Project reports
Number of professionals in the fields of culture, cultural and historical heritage and tourism participating in trainings and/or other joint activities	Persons	200	Project reports
Number of institutions using Programme support for promoting local culture and preserving historical heritage	Institutions	50	Project reports

## 6.4. Thematic Objective 4 “Promotion of Border Management and Border Security”

### 6.4.1. Priority 4.1 “Enhancing Border-crossing Efficiency”

*Specific objective* - promoting border management and border security in the Programme area by improving infrastructure, human resources and administrative provisions of border-crossing facilities on Latvia-Belarus and Lithuania-Belarus borders.

#### Expected results by the Priority

Activities financed under this Priority could result in numerous positive short-term, mid-term and long-term changes in the Programme area. The most important of these include, first of all, enhanced infrastructural, administrative and human capacities of border-crossing facilities; secondly, reduction of inconveniences at the border-crossing points; moreover, enhanced efficiency of border-crossing facilities and, finally, smoother exchange of goods and people between Latvia and Lithuania, on one side, and Belarus, on the other.

*Table 17. Programme result indicators (Priority 4.1.)*

Indicator	Measurement Unit	Baseline Value	Baseline Year	Target Value (2022)	Source of Data
Number of border crossing points with increased	Border-crossing points	4	2013	7	Project reports

throughput capacity					
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### **Actions to be supported under the Priority**

The Programme shall contribute towards upgrading of border-crossing infrastructure and equipment, as well as development of professional knowledge and skills of staff.

#### *Indicative actions to be supported:*

- Development and improvement of infrastructure of border-crossing facilities;
- Acquisition and installation of equipment and/or software in border-crossing facilities;
- Capacity building, training of people working in border-crossing facilities (building skills necessary to use the equipment or infrastructure developed or improved as a result of the Programme's interventions);
- Exchange of knowledge and good practice among border-crossing points;
- Actions aimed at enhancing border security at the "green" borders (sections between border-crossing points), including development of infrastructure and acquisition of equipment for maintaining communication between border-crossing points, as well as experience-sharing activities.

**The guiding principles for the selection of projects (in addition to the Section 9.2)**

Support under this Priority shall only be available to pre-defined beneficiaries.

**The planned use of large infrastructure projects:**

*Table 18. Large infrastructure projects (LIPs) to be implemented under the Priority 4.1.*

Title of the Project	Beneficiary	Partner(s)	Main activities and expected results	Justification for direct award	Estimated budget (MEUR)	Programme's estimated contribution (MEUR)
<b>Modernization of Medininkai Border Crossing Point</b>	Directorate of Border Crossing Infrastructure under the Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania	Belarus State Customs Committee	<p><u>Activities:</u></p> <p>It is foreseen to build new infrastructure (such as parking, traffic lanes, control sites, etc.) for outgoing transport and passengers on Lithuanian side of Medininkai border-crossing point. Existing infrastructure will be used for vehicles and persons entering the border control zone from Belarus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Renovation of existing office building adapted for administrative, commercial, and other services;</li> <li>- Parking for heavy vehicles and service building;</li> <li>- Medininkai border checkpoint is extended from 18 to 27 lanes. For departing from Lithuania 6 truck lanes instead of the current 3 and 7 passenger car lanes instead of the current 5. For arriving to Lithuania 7 truck lanes instead of 5 and 7 passenger car lanes instead of current 5. Number of lanes is gradually increased</li> </ul>	In accordance with national legislation, the Directorate's of Border Crossing Infrastructure under the Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania is a responsible body for establishment, maintenance and development of border crossing points and related infrastructure, as well as	2.78 (minimum 2.5 for infrastructure)	2.5



			<p>before the entering point and in the point territory.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A3 road on Lithuanian side is expanded to 6 lanes instead of existing 3 lanes.</li> <li>- The roadway between Belarusian and Lithuanian border checkpoints is expanded to 6 lanes, 3 in each direction. However, this section of road must be combined with the existing road section in Belarus. If the Lithuanian side of the road is divided into 6 lanes, respectively, the Belarusian side of the road should be divided into 6 lanes as well.</li> <li>- Means of video surveillance cameras installed at the borderline near the Belarus checkpoint.</li> </ul> <p><i>Results:</i></p> <p>Medininkai border-crossing point adapted to operate, according to vehicle traffic intensity, going to / from the Republic of Belarus. Improved working conditions for the inspection officers, passengers and drivers traveling over the border. Increased throughput (estimated at 6100 vehicle / day).</p>	implementation of the strategy for development of border crossing points in Lithuania.		
<b>Reconstruction and Building of Pabradė Foreigners' Registration Centre</b>	State Border Guard Service under the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of	The State Border Committee of the Republic of Belarus; Vilnius County Fire and	<p><i>Activities:</i></p> <p>Adaptation of former military territory for the needs of foreigner's registration centre:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building of control pass point;</li> <li>- Building dormitories for women with children, for restrained women;</li> </ul>	State Border Guard Service at the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania is the only institution in Lithuania, designated to keep illegal	6.44 (minimum 2.5 for infrastructure)	5.8

	Lithuania	Rescue Service; Vilnius County Police Headquarters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Building of reception and registration building, administration premises;</li> <li>– Fencing the territory, installing video surveillance system;</li> <li>– Reconstruction of utilities and communication networks;</li> <li>– Adaptation and reconstruction of existing buildings for fire and rescue service and police and foreigners registration center needs.</li> </ul> <p><i>Results:</i> Former military territory adapted to foreigner’s registration centre needs; improved living conditions for illegal immigrants and refugees; improved conditions for employees; territory integrated into urban surrounding of Pabrade.</p>	immigrants and organise their leave to the country of origin.		
<b>Development of Telecommunication Infrastructure at the Belarus-Lithuania Border (BOMBEL-4)</b>	State Border Committee of the Republic of Belarus	State Border Guard Service under the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania	<p><i>Activities:</i></p> <p>The project idea is to increase both transparency and security of the Belarus-Lithuania border by investing into infrastructure and equipment for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– construction of local area networks, optical fiber and radio relay communication lines on the Belarusian territory;</li> <li>– purchase and installation of communications and IT equipment.</li> </ul> <p>Due to the fact that the border adjacent area vary a lot, an approach combining two types of communications (optical fiber lines or radio relay lines) will be used. The project will also organize at least 2 joint workshops (1 per each country) in order to exchange best experience and practices in the use of communication means for better border management purposes. Locations: Grodno, Lida, Smorgon and Polotsk border areas plus Vilnius and Varena border areas.</p>	The State Border Committee of the Republic of Belarus is the only body in the country which is legally entrusted with the coordination of all issues related with border management and control.	3.67 (minimum 2.5 for infrastructure)	3.3

			<p><i>Results and costs:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preparation of design and estimate documentation;</li> <li>- Construction of local area networks, optical fiber and radio relay communication lines/facilities;</li> <li>- Purchase and installation of communications and IT equipment;</li> <li>- The costs related to purchase of land (up to 10 % of eligible project expenditure).</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Improvement of Infrastructure of Border Crossing Point “Paternieki” (the Republic of Latvia) and “Grigorovshchina” (the Republic of Belarus)</b></p>	<p>State Stock Company “State Real Estate”, the Republic of Latvia</p>	<p>State Customs Committee, the Republic of Belarus;</p> <p>Kraslava Municipality, the Republic of Latvia;</p> <p>State Stock Company “Latvian State Roads”, the Republic of Latvia (involvement possible depending on the</p>	<p><u>Activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elaboration of technical design projects for infrastructure modernization activities in Latvia (road section “Paternieki” – Belarus border, parking lot before border crossing point “Paternieki”, approach road;</li> <li>- Elaboration of technical design project for infrastructure modernization activities (road section “Grigorovshchina” – Latvia border) in Belarus;</li> <li>- Reconstruction of road section cross border point “Paternieki” – Belarus border enlarging the passage into additional driving lanes and erection of other necessary infrastructure including: engineering communications, control barriers walking passages for persons crossing the border on foot in both directions; erection of fencing, transport management infrastructure.</li> <li>- Reconstruction of road section cross border point “Grigorovshchina ” – Latvian border enlarging the passage into additional driving lanes and erection of other necessary infrastructure like walking pages, fencing, etc.;</li> </ul>	<p>The property of border crossing points is state owned in both countries. On Latvian side State Stock Company “State Real Estate” (further –VNĪ) is in charge of managing the land and building there. The State Customs Committee, the Republic of Belarus, in in charge of management of the property on Belarus side accordingly.</p>	<p>3.26 (for LV part)</p> <p>0.67 (for BY part)</p> <p>(minimum 2.5 for infrastructure)</p>	<p>2.93 (for LV part)</p> <p>0.6 (for BY part)</p>

		scope of activities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Erection of a fenced parking lot with modern facilities before cross border point “Paternieki” including a connection to the state road A6 (“Kraslava-“Paternieki/Belarus border) as a part of transport terminal planned by Kraslava Municipality.</li> </ul> <p><i>Results:</i></p> <p>The result of the project will be improved basic transport infrastructure of two border crossing points “Paternieki” and “Grigorovshchina” resulting in time saving for private car owners, cargo vehicles and persons to cross border in both directions (Belarus-Latvia, Latvia-Belarus), as well as decreased queues on national state road A6 before the border crossing point “Paternieki”.</p> <p>The result will also be seen as an increased throughput capacity of border crossing points to manage increasing transport flows in future in reference to all types of transport. The other result is improved safety conditions for persons having decided to cross the border on foot daily, personnel of inspection services, car and truck drivers.</p>			
<b>Modernization of Urbany-Silene border crossing point (Latvia-Belarus)</b>	State Customs Committee, the Republic of Belarus (Vitebsk dpt.)	State Stock Company “State Real Estate”, the Republic of Latvia	<p><u>Activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building a new customs inspection complex at “Urbany”;</li> <li>- Technical design project for infrastructure modernization activities in Latvia;</li> <li>- Technical design project for infrastructure modernization activities in Belarus;</li> <li>- Reconstruction of road section between “Silene” and “Urbany” enlarging the passage into additional driving lanes in both directions, including reconstruction of engineering</li> </ul>	The property of border crossing points is state owned in both countries. On Latvian side State Stock Company “State Real Estate” (further –VNĪ) is in charge of managing the land and building there. The State	1.19 (for LV part)  3.89 (for BY part) (minimum 2.5 for infrastructure)	1.07 (for LV part)  3.5 (for BY part)

		<p>communications and installing separate control barriers in both directions;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Erection of walking passages for persons crossing the border on foot in both directions;</li> <li>- Erection of fencing to divide the import and export lines and fence the territory;</li> <li>- Improvement of transport management infrastructure (vehicle stopping equipment, electric billboards, etc.) to facilitate the transport flow management.</li> </ul> <p><u>Results:</u></p> <p>The results of the project will be improved basic transport infrastructure in border crossing checkpoints resulting in time saving for private car owners, cargo vehicles and persons to cross border in both directions (Belarus- Latvia, Latvia-Belarus).</p> <p>The result will also be seen as an increased capacity of border crossing point to manage increasing transport flows in reference to all types of transport. The other result is improved safety conditions for those persons having decided to cross the border on foot.</p>	<p>Customs Committee, the Republic of Belarus, in charge of management of the property on Belarus side accordingly.</p>		
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*Table 19. Programme output indicators (Priority 4.1.)*

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2022)	Source of data
Number of border management sites renovated/upgraded	Border management sites	6	Project reports
Number of employees of border crossing points who have participated in training and/or experience exchange activities	Persons	40	Project reports

## 7. INDICATIVE FINANCING PLAN

### 7.1. The Financial Appropriation

*Table 20. The amount of the total financial appropriation envisaged for the support from the Union and co-financing for the whole programming period, EUR*

<b>Indicative financing plan of the ENI CBC Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus Programme,</b> providing the EU Contribution and the co-financing if known for the whole programming period for each thematic objective and for Technical Assistance				
<i>Thematic objectives by source of funding (in euros):</i>				
	<b>EC Funding (a) *</b>	<b>Co-financing (b)</b>	<b>Co-financing rate (in %) (c) **</b>	<b>Total funding (d) = (a)+(b)</b>
<b>Thematic objective 1</b>	16,500,000	1,650,000	10	18,150,000
<b>Thematic objective 2</b>	14,400,000	1,440,000	10	15,840,000
<b>Thematic objective 3</b>	16,000,000	1,600,000	10	17,600,000
<b>Thematic objective 4</b>	19,700,000	1,970,000	10	21,670,000
<b>Technical Assistance</b>	7,400,000	740,000	10	8,140,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>74,000,000</b>	<b>7,400,000</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>81,400,000</b>
* In accordance with the Strategy Paper.				
** Co-financing rate shall be calculated on the basis of the Community contribution to the joint operational programme, in accordance with Articles 12, 13 and 14 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014 of 18 August 2014.				

Table 21. The amount of the yearly financial appropriation envisaged for the support from the Union, EUR

<b>Programme financial table</b>				
	A	B	C	D
	INDICATIVE PROVISIONAL COMMITMENTS BY THE EC	CO-FINANCING	PROGRAMME'S INDICATIVE PROVISIONAL COMMITMENTS - EC funding -	PROGRAMME'S INDICATIVE PROVISIONAL PAYMENTS - EC funding -
<b>2015</b>				
Projects	8,482,437	0	0	0
TA		0	0	0
<b>TOTAL 2015</b>	<b>8,482,437</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>2016</b>				
Projects	9,773,874	350,000	3,500,000	1,400,000
TA		78,000	780,000	780,000
<b>TOTAL 2016</b>	<b>9,773,874</b>	<b>428,000</b>	<b>4,280,000</b>	<b>2,180,000</b>
<b>2017</b>				
Projects	14,925,586	1,100,000	11,000,000	5,800,000
TA		82,000	820,000	820,000
<b>TOTAL 2017</b>	<b>14,925,586</b>	<b>1,182,000</b>	<b>11,820,000</b>	<b>6,620,000</b>
<b>2018</b>				
Projects	12,844,074	1,660,000	16,600,000	11,740,000
TA		85,000	850,000	850,000
<b>TOTAL 2018</b>	<b>12,844,074</b>	<b>1,745,000</b>	<b>17,450,000</b>	<b>12,590,000</b>



2019				
Projects	13,872,308	2,230,000	22,300,000	17,760,000
TA		88,000	880,000	880,000
<b>TOTAL 2019</b>	<b>13,872,308</b>	<b>2,318,000</b>	<b>23,180,000</b>	<b>18,640,000</b>
2020				
Projects	14,101,721	1,320,000	13,200,000	17,520,000
TA		90,000	900,000	900,000
<b>TOTAL 2020</b>	<b>14,101,721</b>	<b>1,410,000</b>	<b>14,100,000</b>	<b>18,420,000</b>
2021				
Projects	0	0	0	9,740,000
TA		91,000	910,000	910,000
<b>TOTAL 2021</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>91,000</b>	<b>910,000</b>	<b>10,650,000</b>
2022				
Projects	0	0	0	1,980,000
TA		93,000	930,000	930,000
<b>TOTAL 2022</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>93,000</b>	<b>930,000</b>	<b>2,910,000</b>
2023				
Projects	0	0	0	660,000
TA		88,000	880,000	880,000
<b>TOTAL 2023</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>88,000</b>	<b>880,000</b>	<b>1,540,000</b>
2024				

<b>Projects</b>		<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
<b>TA</b>	<b>0</b>	<i>45,000</i>	<i>450,000</i>	<i>450,000</i>
<b>TOTAL 2024</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>45,000</b>	<b>450,000</b>	<b>450,000</b>
<b>TOTAL 2015-2024</b>	<b>74,000,000</b>	<b>7,400,000</b>	<b>74,000,000</b>	<b>74,000,000</b>
<b>TOTAL COFINANCING RATE</b>			<b>10%</b>	<b>%</b>

\*\* Subject to a mid-term review of the Programme

In accordance with Article 12(3) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the applicable EU rules on State aid will be taken into account during the implementation of the Programme.

The preparatory actions that the Programme intends to implement will be financed by the ENPI CBC 2007-2013 Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus Programme's Technical Assistance budget, subject to the adoption of the corresponding decision modifying the 2007-2013 Programmes by the Commission. The preparatory actions will encompass costs of preparation of the Programme Document, Strategic Environment Assessment and other related documents necessary for implementation of the Programme, translation, external expertise costs, organisation and participation in the working meetings and other Programme-related events, as well as website development.

## **7.2. Co-financing**

As indicated in Article 12 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, co-financing shall amount to at least 10 % of the Union contribution. Where possible, co-financing shall be distributed in a balanced way throughout the duration of the Programme to ensure that the minimum objective of 10 % is achieved by the end of the Programme. The participating countries shall determine the source, amount and distribution of co-financing.

## **7.3. Eligibility of Costs**

Eligible and non-eligible costs of the Programme are outlined in Article 48 and Article 49 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, respectively.

## **7.4. Use of the Euro**

In accordance with Article 67 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, expenditure incurred in a currency other than euro shall be converted into euro by the beneficiaries using the monthly accounting exchange rate of the Commission in the month during which that expenditure was incurred.

## **7.5. Timeframe for the Programme Implementation**

The period of execution of the Programme shall start at the earliest on the date of the adoption of the Programme by the Commission and end on 31 December 2024 at the latest. All project activities financed by the Programme shall end on 31 December 2022 at the latest.

It is estimated that the first Call for Proposals will be launched in the middle of 2016, the second Call for Proposals - in 2017. Subsequent calls for proposals will be launched according to the needs of the Programme and available financing. The implementation of the projects could be started by the end of 2016 - beginning of 2017.

## 8. AUTHORITIES AND BODIES OF THE PROGRAMME

Table 22. Programme authorities

Authority	Name of the authority
<b>Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC)</b>	Set up by the participating countries specifically for the Programme
<b>Managing Authority (MA)</b>	The Regional Policy Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania
<b>National Authorities (NAs)</b>	<p><i>Latvia:</i> the Development Instruments Department of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia</p> <p><i>Lithuania:</i> the Regional Policy Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania</p> <p><i>Belarus:</i> the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus</p>
<b>Audit Authority (AA)</b>	The Internal Audit Division of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, supported by the Group of Auditors

Table 19. Bodies carrying out control and audit tasks

Bodies	Name of the bodies
<b>Bodies designated to carry out control tasks</b>	<p>The expenditure declared by the beneficiary in support of a payment request shall be examined by an auditor or by a competent public officer being independent from the beneficiary, satisfying the requirements laid out in Article 32(1) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014.</p> <p>In Lithuania and Belarus, decentralized control systems operate, while in Latvia centralized control system is established. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia shall be responsible for the functioning of control system in Latvia. Expenditures incurred by the beneficiaries on Lithuanian and Belarusian sides of the border shall be verified by auditors designated separately for each project.</p>
<b>Bodies designated to carry out audit tasks</b>	<p>Representatives from the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia shall be appointed as Latvian representatives in the Group of Auditors.</p> <p>Representatives from the Internal Audit Division of the Ministry of the</p>

	<p>Interior of the Republic of Lithuania shall be appointed as Lithuanian representatives in the Group of Auditors.</p> <p>Representatives from the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Belarus shall be appointed as Belarusian representatives in the Group of Auditors.</p>
<p><b>Control Contact Points (CCPs)</b></p>	<p>The Development Instruments Department of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia shall perform the functions of the CCP in Latvia.</p> <p>The Regional Policy Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania shall perform the functions of the CCP in Lithuania</p> <p>The Coordinating Unit for the European Union's Tacis Programme in the Republic of Belarus shall perform the functions of the CCP in Belarus.</p>

### 8.1. Joint Monitoring Committee

In accordance with Article 21 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, within three months of the date of the adoption of the Programme by the Commission, the participating countries shall set up the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC). In conformity with Article 22 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the JMC will be composed of 15 members, encompassing representatives appointed by all three participating countries (5 representatives from each country necessarily representing national and regional level institutions and, optionally, local authorities and other social-economic partners of the Programme area), and shall have a rotating chair on annual basis.

Any conflict of interest within the JMC members is unwarrantable. Any decisions and/or assessment made by the JMC have to be free from bias and must not be influenced by partial interest of any of the individual members of JMC involved in the assessment of the projects. In order to avoid any conflict of interest, individual members of the JMC must not act as a beneficiary or as any of the project partners and must not be financially involved in the project (as a beneficiary, partner, supplier, staff member, expert or consultant contracted by the beneficiary and/or partners). Each member of the JMC will sign a declaration of confidentiality and impartiality applicable to the whole evaluation process. In case of the conflict of interest, the persons engaged in the latter shall declare it and shall not participate in the decision making process.

The Commission will participate in the work of the JMC as an observer. As stipulated in Article 23 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, all decisions of the JMC shall be taken by consensus where each country shall have one vote, regardless of the number of its representatives. The JMC shall unanimously draw up and adopt its Rules of Procedure where information regarding its operating principles shall be laid out in detail.

The main responsibility of the JMC is to monitor the implementation of the Programme. In compliance with Article 24 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the JMC shall follow the

implementation of the Programme and progress towards its priorities using the objectively verifiable indicators and related target values defined in the Programme. Furthermore, it shall examine all issues affecting the performance of the Programme, and may issue recommendations to the MA regarding the implementation of the Programme and its evaluation. Consequently, the JMC shall monitor actions undertaken as a result of its recommendations. In addition, the JMC shall participate in the project selection procedure.

In accordance with Article 23 and Article 24 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the JMC shall perform the following functions:

- Examine and approve:
  - Work programme and financial plan (including planned use of TA) of the MA and the JTS;
  - Criteria for selecting projects to be financed under the Programme;
  - Application package, including guidelines for applicants;
- Appoint assessors from the staff of the JTS and external assessors, where necessary, for performing quality assessment of project applications;
- Select projects to be financed under the Programme, in accordance with the principles of transparency, equal treatment, non-discrimination, objectivity and fair competition;
- Take final decision on approval or rejection of complaints regarding selection of projects;
- Monitor:
  - Implementation of annual information and communication plan;
  - Implementation of annual monitoring and evaluation plan;
  - Implementation by the MA of the work programme and financial plan;
- Examine and approve annual and final implementation reports, including as integral parts annual information and communication plans, and annual monitoring and evaluation plans;
- Examine any contentious cases brought to its attention by the MA;
- Discuss and take decision on any proposal to revise the Programme.

## **8.2. Managing Authority**

In accordance with Article 25 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania shall, by issuing an official order, designate the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania as Managing Authority of this Programme. The designation of the Managing Authority shall be based on a report and an opinion of the Audit

Authority assessing the compliance of the management and control system, including the role of intermediate bodies therein, with the designation criteria laid down in Annex I to the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014 (Implementing Rules).

The Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania will act as both Managing Authority (MA) and Audit Authority (AA). The separation of functions between the MA and the AA will be guaranteed within the organisational framework of the Ministry. In particular, the tasks of the MA and the AA will be performed by separate and mutually independent departments of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, namely the Regional Policy Department (sharing functions with the Economics and Finance Department) and the Internal Audit Division, respectively. The Regional Policy Department is subordinate to the Vice-Minister, the Economics and Finance Department - to the Chancellor, while the Internal Audit Division - to the Minister of the Interior.

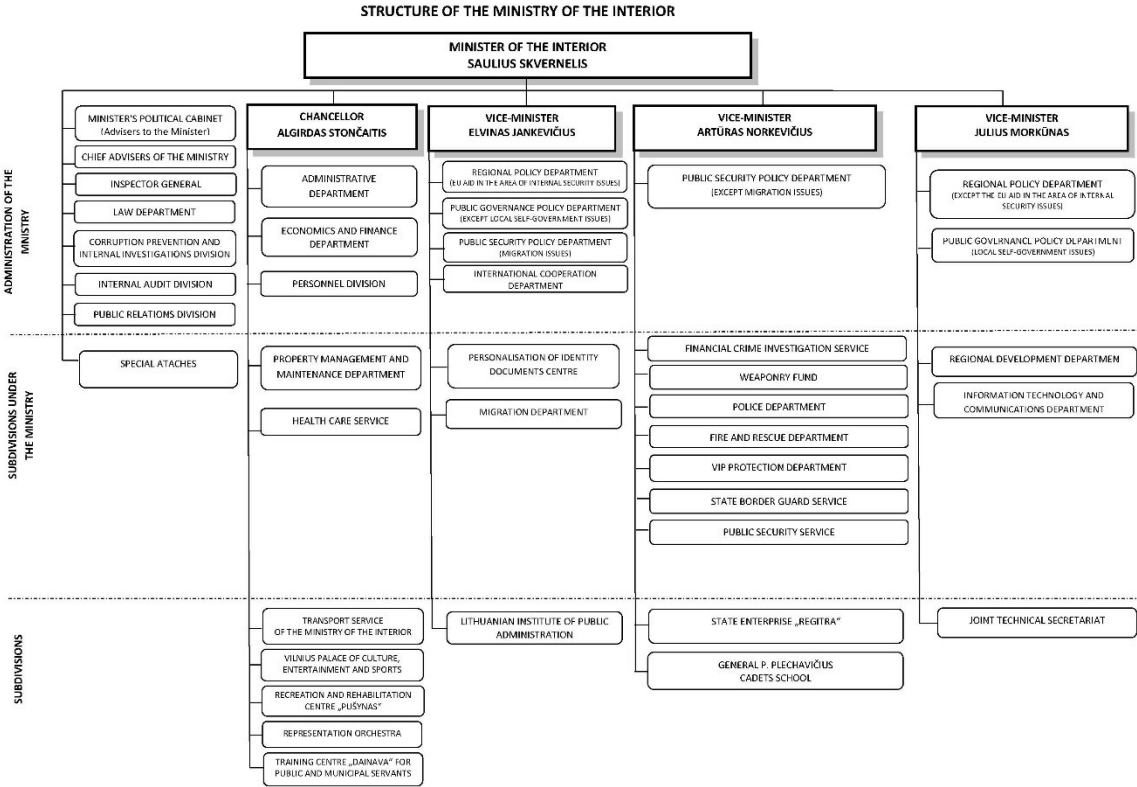


Figure 3. The organigram of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania

In accordance with Article 26 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the main responsibility of the Managing Authority (MA) is to manage the Programme in accordance with the principle of sound financial management and ensure that decisions of the JMC comply with the applicable law and provisions.

The MA shall be responsible for the following tasks:

- Ensure that project selection procedures are drawn up, and, once approved by the JMC, launched (with assistance from the JTS);
- Ensure effective management of the project selection procedures (with assistance from the JTS);
- Assess complaints (with assistance from the JTS) and provide the JMC with findings of this assessment;
- Sign Grant Contract with the Lead Beneficiary;
- Ensure that each Lead Beneficiary is provided with a document setting out the conditions for support for each project including the financing plan and execution deadlines (with assistance from the JTS);
- Ensure that beneficiaries are provided with information necessary for implementing the projects (with assistance from the JTS);
- Ensure that the operational follow-up of the projects is carried out (with assistance from the JTS);
- Ensure that a system to record and store, in computerised form, data on each project necessary for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, control and audit is established and maintained (with assistance from the JTS);
- Ensure (with assistance from the JTS) that the expenditure of each beneficiary has been verified (in accordance with Article 26(6) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014) by bodies designated to carry out control tasks, in order to check whether requirements laid out in Article 26 (5) (a) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014 have been fulfilled;
- Approve requests on projects' amendments;
- Ensure that annual information and communication plan is implemented (with assistance from the JTS);
- Ensure that annual monitoring and evaluation plan is implemented;
- Ensure (with assistance from the JTS) that the JMC is provided with:
  - Data necessary for tracking the progress of the Programme in achieving its expected results and targets;
  - Support in performing its tasks.
- Draw up the annual accounts of the Programme;
- Ensure that effective and proportionate anti-fraud measures are put in place;



- Ensure that beneficiaries involved in the implementation of projects maintain either a separate accounting system or a suitable accounting code for all transactions relating to a project (with assistance from the JTS);
- Ensure that procedures are set up for managing the documents on expenditure and audits necessary for ensuring an adequate audit trail (with assistance from the JTS).
- Draw up and submit payment requests to the Commission, taking into account the results of all audits carried out by or under the responsibility of the AA;
- Make payments to the beneficiaries as quickly as possible, according to the provisions laid out in Article 63 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014;
- Maintain computerised accounting records for expenditure declared to the Commission and for payments made to beneficiaries;
- Keep an account of amounts recoverable and of amounts reduced following cancellation of all or part of the grant;
- Ensure that annual and final implementation reports, including as integral part annual information and communication plans, and annual monitoring and evaluation plans, are drawn up and, once approved by the JMC, submitted to the Commission (with assistance from the JTS);
- Ensure that management declaration and annual summary is drawn up and, after approval by the JMC, submitted to the Commission (with assistance from the JTS);
- Keep all documents related to the Programme or a project (e.g. reports, supporting documents, accounts, accounting documents, contracting documents, etc.) for five years from the date of payment of the balance for the Programme or a project;
- Following the prior approval by the JMC and, in the cases foreseen in Article 6 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the prior approval by the Commission, make changes of the Programme and inform the Commission of any of these changes, providing all necessary information.

### **8.3. National Authorities**

In accordance with Article 20 (6) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, each participating country shall appoint a National Authority (NA) responsible for supporting the MA in the management of the Programme.

In conformity with Article 31 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the NAs shall perform the following functions:

- Take responsibility for setting up and effective functioning of management and control systems at national level;

- Ensure the overall coordination of the institutions involved in the implementation of the Programme at national level;
- Represent their countries in the JMC.

The NAs shall, in particular, carry out the following tasks:

- Prevent, detect and correct irregularities on their respective territories, notify these irregularities without delay to the MA and ensure that national systems for prevention, detection and correction of irregularities function effectively;
- Appoint national representatives to the Group of Auditors;
- In the case of Latvia's NA, designate the body responsible for carrying out control tasks in the Latvian part of Programme area;
- Designate bodies responsible for carrying out the functions of the Control Contact Points;
- Following the request of the JTS or the MA, check the possibility of double-financing of projects implemented by the beneficiaries operating on their territories;
- Recover to the MA the amounts unduly paid to the beneficiaries operating on their territories, where these amounts cannot be recovered;
- In the case of Belarus' NA, the terms of liability for recovery of the amounts unduly paid to the beneficiaries operating in the Belarusian part of the Programme area, where these amounts cannot be recovered, as well as the mechanisms for such recovery, will be stipulated in the Financing Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the European Commission on implementation of the Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus EU CBC Programme for 2014-2020;
- Bear responsibility for the payments of the national contributions to the Programme's TA.

In Latvia, one of the main mechanisms for coordination between this Programme and other operational programmes is the National Subcommittee - a collegial institution that provides advice to the NA regarding implementation and monitoring of the ETC programmes. National Subcommittee is composed of representatives of the ministries and subordinate institutions, planning regions and non-governmental organizations. Its responsibilities include, among others, provision of advice on compliance of the project applications submitted by the potential Latvian beneficiaries of the Programme with the national and regional planning documents and priorities, as well as advise on the possible risks of overlapping of the foreseen activities with those of other national or international programmes. The National Subcommittee has the right to propose to the NA either to approve the submitted project application for funding, or to reject it. It may also propose additional conditions for project applications.

## 8.4. Joint Technical Secretariat

In compliance with the provisions of Article 27 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) was set up by the participating countries. The public establishment *Joint Technical Secretariat*, which was founded for the purpose of providing technical assistance to INTERREG IIIA and TACIS (2004-2006), European Territorial Cooperation, as well as European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (2007-2013) programmes, has been designated as the Joint Technical Secretariat of the Programme.

The JTS shall have international staff, representing citizens of all participating countries and covering all relevant languages - Latvian, Lithuanian, Belarusian, Russian and English. The staff of the JTS shall be employed under the Labour Law of the Republic of Lithuania. The number and qualification of the staff shall correspond to the functions carried out by the JTS. The operation of the JTS will be financed from the Technical Assistance budget.

The main responsibility of the JTS is to assist the MA, the JMC and, where relevant, the Audit Authority (AA), in carrying out their respective functions. In particular, it shall inform potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities under the Programme and shall assist beneficiaries in the implementation of projects.

Some functions of the MA might be delegated to the JTS on the condition that, as stipulated in ANNEX I (1) (ii) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, there is a framework for ensuring the definition of the respective responsibilities and obligations of the JTS, as well as for verification of its capacities to carry out delegated tasks, and reporting procedures exist. Delegated tasks shall be formally recorded in writing and implemented with respect to a sound separation of functions. Moreover, the detailed tasks of the JTS, compliant with the Programme document, shall be recorded in a written agreement concluded between the MA and the JTS, as well as in the Rules of Procedure of the JTS.

The JTS shall perform the following functions:

- Draw up, launch and manage selection procedures, i. e.:
  - Develop and apply appropriate documents required for calls for proposals;
  - Prepare and make available application package (application forms, guidelines, manuals for applicants, etc.);
  - Launch calls for proposals;
  - Register submitted project applications;
  - Assess administrative compliance of project applications;
  - Assess technical eligibility of project applications;
  - Perform, where necessary with support by external experts, quality assessment of eligible project applications;

- Assess complaints regarding project selection;
- Following the final decision on project selection by the JMC, inform the Lead Beneficiary about the final results concerning assessment and selection of project applications;
- Prepare Grant Contracts;
- Draw up and implement annual information and communication plans, i.e.:
  - Provide information and advice to applicants (via phone, fax, e-mail, skype or consultation meetings);
  - Provide to beneficiaries information necessary for implementing the projects (via phone, fax, e-mail, skype or consultation meetings);
  - Distribute information on the Programme and its projects, including running of the Programme's website;
  - Organise activities to promote the Programme;
  - Organise partner search events in the Programme territory;
- Assist in implementation of projects, i.e.:
  - Provide beneficiaries with a document setting out the conditions for support for each project, including the financing plan and the time limit for execution;
  - Carry out operational follow-up of the projects;
  - Provide information and advice to beneficiaries via consultations and training events;
  - Make the desk-check of project partners' reports and requests for payments, and present the conclusion to the MA;
  - Take measures to avoid double-financing of the projects;
  - Examine requests on projects' amendments and present to the MA;
  - Ensure that beneficiaries involved in the implementation of projects maintain either a separate accounting system or a suitable accounting code for all transactions relating to a project;
  - Ensure that the expenditure of each beneficiary has been verified;
  - Manage documents on expenditure and audits;
- Carry out the usual work of a secretariat of the JMC, i.e. organise meetings, prepare documents, draft minutes, etc.;
- Implement annual monitoring and evaluation plans, i.e.:
  - Administer the computerized data recording and storing system;

- Monitor progress made by projects through collecting and checking reports, monitoring outputs, and results on financial implementation;
- Carry out on-the-spot checks and monitoring visits where relevant;
- Provide the JMC with data necessary for tracking the progress of the Programme in achieving its expected results and targets;
- Monitor commitments and payments of funds at Programme level by categories of intervention;
- Draw up and submit to the MA:
  - Management declaration and annual summary;
  - Report summarising the findings of evaluations carried out during the programming period;
  - Annual and final implementation reports, including as integral part annual information and communication plans, and annual monitoring and evaluation plans;
- Efficiently manage TA budget (accounting, procurement, payments, reporting);
- Co-operate with organisations, institutions and networks relevant for objectives of the Programme.

## **8.5. Branch Offices**

In accordance with Article 27 (3) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, following a decision of the participating countries, Branch Offices (BOs) of the JTS will be established in Latvia (Daugavpils) and Belarus (Minsk). The operation of the BOs will be financed from the Technical Assistance budget.

The BOs shall assist the MA and the JTS in carrying out their functions. In particular, they shall perform the following tasks:

- Support the MA and the JTS in organising information activities in Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus (for example, provide relevant information to potential applicants, beneficiaries and project partners);
- Support the MA and the JTS in carrying out communication activities in Latvia and Belarus (for example, contribute to preparation of publications and informational material);
- Support the MA and the JTS in providing assistance in project implementation activities;
- Support the MA and the JTS in carrying out monitoring activities (for example, participate in the on-site visits and project events);

- Support the MA and the JTS in carrying out projects evaluation.

## **8.6. Audit Authority**

In accordance with Article 20(2) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the Audit Authority (AA), situated in the Member State hosting the MA and functionally independent from the MA, shall be set up. It shall be assisted by the Group of Auditors which shall draw up its own Rules of Procedure and be chaired by the AA. In conformity with Article 29 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the Commission shall cooperate with the AA to coordinate its audit plans and methods.

The AA, with support from the Group of Auditors, shall perform the following functions:

- Within 9 months of the signature of the first financing agreement, prepare and submit to the Commission an audit strategy for performance of audits, described in detail in Article 28(5) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014;
- Ensure that audits are carried out on an appropriate sample of projects;
- Ensure that audits are carried out on the management and control systems of the Programme;
- Ensure that audits are carried out on the annual accounts of the Programme;
- Ensure that the audit work complies with internationally accepted audit standards;
- Draw up an audit opinion on the annual accounts for the preceding accounting year, described in detail in Article 68 (4) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014;
- Draw up an annual audit report, described in detail in Article 68 (2) (e) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014.

## **8.7. Control Contact Points**

In addition to control tasks performed by an auditor or a competent and independent public officer, the MA shall perform its own verifications as referred to in Article 26(5) (a) and (6) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014. The participating countries shall take all possible measures to support the MA in its control tasks. For the purpose of carrying out verifications throughout the whole Programme area, the MA shall be assisted by the Control Contact Points. The functions of the latter may be fulfilled by the NAs of the participating countries.

## **9. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL ARRANGEMENTS**

### **9.1. Nature of the Programme**

#### **9.1.1. Projects**

Projects to be funded under the Programme shall be selected through calls for proposals and, in the cases singled out in Article 41(1) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, through direct award.

The number of calls for proposals per year shall be flexible depending on the progress of the Programme. For each call for proposals the JTS shall provide applicants with a document setting out the conditions for the participation in the call, selection and implementation of the project, including the specific requirements concerning the deliverables under the project, the financial plan, and the time-limit for execution.

No more than 30 per cent of the EU contribution to the Programme budget may be allocated to large infrastructure projects (LIPs), where a budget share of at least EUR 2.5 million is allocated to acquisition of infrastructure. LIPs shall be selected through direct award procedure. The following LIPs are foreseen to be supported by this Programme:

1. “Creation of Modern Ethnocultural Environment in Vilnius Pranciškus Skorina Gymnasium and Lida State Secondary School No. 4”;
2. “Modernization of Medininkai Border Crossing Point”;
3. “Reconstruction and Building of Pabradė Foreigners’ Registration Centre”;
4. “Development of Telecommunication Infrastructure at the Belarus-Lithuania Border (BOMBEL-4)”;
5. “Improvement of Infrastructure of Border Crossing Point “Paternieki” (the Republic of Latvia) and “Grigorovshchina” (the Republic of Belarus)”;
6. “Modernization of Urbany-Silene border crossing point (Latvia-Belarus)

#### **9.1.2. Beneficiaries**

Projects shall involve beneficiaries from the Programme area, coming from at least one of the participating Member States (Latvia or Lithuania) and participating Partner Country (Belarus). All beneficiaries shall actively cooperate in:

- Development of projects;
- Implementation of projects.

Furthermore, as stipulated in Article 46 (2) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, they shall cooperate in one of the following or both ways:

- Staffing;
- Financing of projects.

Project Lead Beneficiary and/or beneficiaries may be:

- National, regional and local authorities.
- Bodies governed by public law, associations formed by one or several such authorities or one or several of such bodies governed by public law:
  - established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character,
  - having legal personality and
  - financed, for the most part, by the State, regional or local authorities, or other bodies governed by public law; or subject to management supervision by those bodies; or having an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law.
- Non-state actors (established for the specific purpose of meeting needs for the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character and having legal personality):
  - non-governmental organisations;
  - local citizens' groups; communities; public enterprises;
  - local organisations (including networks) involved in decentralised regional cooperation and integration;
  - women's and youth organisations, teaching, cultural research and scientific organisations;
  - universities;
  - cross-border associations, non-governmental associations and independent foundations;
  - international organisations with a base of operations in the Programme area;
  - European grouping of territorial cooperation.

In addition, project beneficiaries may be (except for LIPs where they can be Lead Beneficiaries):



- Public equivalent bodies which means any legal body governed by public or private law:
  - established for the specific purpose of meeting needs for the general interest and having partly industrial or commercial character,
  - having legal personality, and
    - either financed, for the most part, by the state, or regional or local authorities or other bodies governed by public law;
    - or subject to management supervision by those bodies,
    - or having an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, where more than half of the members are appointed by the state, regional or local authorities or by other bodies governed by public law.

Prior to the submission of the proposal, each project shall designate one Lead Beneficiary responsible for management and coordination of the entire project and directly accountable to the MA for the operational and financial progress of all project activities. The Lead Beneficiary shall sign the partnership agreement with other beneficiaries (partners) when submitting the project application. Prior to the signing of the grant contract, the Lead Beneficiary shall lay down the arrangements for its relations with beneficiaries in an agreement comprising, *inter alia*, provisions guaranteeing the distribution of the grant to the project beneficiaries, the joint project implementation, staffing, reporting, financing, and the sound financial management of the funds allocated to the project, including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid. The Lead Beneficiary shall submit project application and project implementation reports to the JTS.

### **9.1.3. Principles of Cooperation**

As stipulated in Article 39 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, financial contribution from the Programme might be assigned to projects implemented in the Programme area, delivering a clear cross-border cooperation impact and benefits, demonstrating added value to Union strategies and programmes, and falling within one of the following categories:

- Integrated projects, where each beneficiary implements a part of the activities of the project on its own territory;
- Symmetrical projects, where similar activities are implemented in parallel in the participating countries;
- Single-country projects, where projects are implemented mainly or entirely in one of the participating countries but for the benefit of all or some of the participating countries, and where cross-border impacts and benefits are identified.

Projects meeting the criteria described above may be partially implemented outside the Programme area provided that:

- They are necessary for achieving the objectives of the Programme and benefit the Programme area;
- The total amount allocated under the Programme to activities outside the Programme area does not exceed 5 per cent of the Union contribution at Programme level;
- The obligations of the MA and AA in relation to management, control and audit concerning the project are fulfilled either by the Programme authorities or through agreements concluded with authorities in the countries where the activity is implemented.

## **9.2. Project Selection**

### **9.2.1. Calls for Proposals**

The JTS shall register project applications submitted. Subsequently, three aspects of these applications, namely administrative compliance, technical eligibility and quality, shall be assessed. Afterwards, the decision regarding project selection shall be made.

#### ***Assessment***

1. Administrative compliance: the JTS shall assess administrative compliance of applications (on the basis of administrative criteria which shall be described in a call for proposals document setting out the conditions for support).
2. Technical eligibility: the JTS shall assess technical eligibility of applicants, partners, amounts requested and activities (on the basis of eligibility criteria which shall be described in a call for proposals document setting out the conditions for support).

The results of administrative compliance and technical eligibility assessment shall be approved by the MA and communicated to Lead Beneficiaries without delay.

3. Quality assessment: the JMC shall appoint assessors from the staff of the JTS and, if it is deemed necessary, external assessors for performing quality assessment of applications, assessed on the basis of administrative and eligibility criteria. Following the quality assessment, the assessment report, including assessment grids, scores, comments from the assessors and a list of non-eligible applications with justifications of their non-eligibility, shall be issued.

The MA will consult the list of projects recommended for funding with the European Commission to avoid double funding and promote synergies with the existing projects, where

possible. Following this consultation, the JMC may decide to reject initially recommended proposals.

### ***Selection***

The JMC, taking into account information laid out in the assessment report provided by the JTS, shall select projects for funding and decide on the funding amount for each project. In order to enact the principles of transparency, equal treatment, non-discrimination, objectivity and fair competition, as stipulated in the ANNEX of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the JMC shall comply with these requirements:

- the projects shall be selected and awarded on the basis of pre-announced selection and award criteria which are defined in the evaluation grid;
- the grants shall be subject to *ex ante* and *ex post* publicity rules;
- the applicants shall be informed in writing about the evaluation results;
- the same rules and conditions shall be applied to all applicants.

The JMC might either approve or reject an application indicating the reasons for selection or rejection, or approve the application conditionally, indicating a list of minor corrections to be made. However, corrections should cover technical aspects only and not change the content or objectives, main outputs or activities of the proposed project. Following selection of projects, the JTS shall immediately inform the Lead Beneficiary about the results concerning their proposal and prepare the grant contract. The MA shall sign the grant contract with the Lead Beneficiary.

### ***Complaint procedure***

Within one month after communication of the JMC decision, together with reasons for rejecting the application, applicants may submit a complaint, giving clear arguments why the rejection of the application is not acceptable. Complaints shall be assessed by the MA with support of the JTS. Subsequently, the decision regarding approval or rejection of complaints shall be proposed to the JMC, which, in turn, shall take the final decision.

#### **9.2.2. Direct Award**

As stipulated in Article 41 of the Regulation No 897/2014, projects may be awarded through direct award only in the following cases and provided this is duly substantiated in the award decision:

- the body to which a project is awarded enjoys a *de jure* or *de facto* monopoly;

- the project relates to actions with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body based on its technical competence, high degree of specialisation or administrative power.

After adoption of the Programme, but not later than 31 December 2017, the MA shall provide the EC with the full project applications including the information referred to in Article 43 of the Regulation No 897/2014 together with the justification for a direct award.

The projects proposed for selection without a call for proposals shall be approved by the EC based on a two-step procedure, consisting of the submission of a project summary followed by a full project application. For each step, the EC shall notify its decision to the MA within two months of the document submission date. This deadline may be extended where necessary. Where the EC rejects a proposed project, it shall notify the MA of its reasons.

The estimated time for submission of applications for projects within direct award is planned in years 2016-2017. Contracts for large infrastructure projects selected through direct award shall be signed and contribution to financial instruments shall be provided before 30 June 2019.

### ***Project summary stage***

The NAs shall identify beneficiaries of the projects and the JMC shall establish the grant amount for each project;

Following invitation beneficiaries shall prepare the project summary and submit to the JTS within set deadlines;

1. JTS/MA shall carry out verification of the project summary and request clarifications within the set deadlines, if needed, in order to ensure appropriate quality of project summary;
2. JMC shall approve project summary;
3. MA shall submit approved project summary to the EC for approval;
4. After EC approval, MA shall invite beneficiaries to prepare and submit full project applications within set deadlines.

### ***Full application evaluation stage***

1. Beneficiaries shall prepare full application in accordance with requirements of Article 43 of the Regulation No 897/2014;
2. Lead Beneficiary shall submit full application with full set of technical documentation for construction works to the JTS within set deadline;

3. JTS/MA shall carry out verification of correspondence of the full application to the project summary accepted by the EC and with the formal requirements, and request clarifications, if needed, in order to ensure consistency of the full application with the formal requirements and quality of application;
4. JMC shall approve full application;
5. MA shall submit full application to the EC for approval;
6. In case any application is not submitted within the set deadlines or at all, the information on it shall be provided to the JMC for a decision.

### **9.3. Monitoring and Evaluation System**

Programme monitoring and evaluation shall aim at improving the quality of the design and implementation, as well as at assessing and improving its consistency, effectiveness, efficiency and impact. Furthermore, the findings of monitoring and evaluations shall be taken into account in the programming and implementation cycle.

#### **9.3.1. Monitoring**

As stipulated in Article 78 of Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the MA, with assistance from the JTS, shall carry out result-oriented monitoring of the Programme and projects. The latter shall be performed by reference to the indicators for outputs and results specified in this Programme and shall be based on:

- Grant contracts with beneficiaries, setting up quantifiable outputs and results as well as indicators for their achievement for each project;
- Project progress reports, regularly submitted to the JTS by the Lead Beneficiary (as requested in the grant contracts);
- On-the-spot checks, performed by the JTS in order to assess the progress of the projects against the objectives of the Programme, and on-site visits to projects, were relevant.

The JTS shall be responsible for gathering the data necessary for monitoring activities from project progress reports and, where relevant, official statistic databases of the participating countries.

The indicative monitoring plan of the Programme for its whole duration (encompassing result and output indicators for each priority, along with their measurement units, data sources, baselines, milestones and final targets) is provided below.

*Table 23. Indicative monitoring plan of the Programme*

Programme Priority	Indicator	Type of indicator	Measurement unit	Data source	Baseline	Milestone for 2018	Final target (2023)
Enhancing the access to social and other services for vulnerable groups	Number of new/improved and/or more accessible social or other services for vulnerable groups in the Programme area	Result	Services	Project reports	6		14
	Number of organisations cooperating in the field of new/improved and/or more accessible social and other services for vulnerable groups in the Programme area	Output	Organisations	Project reports	N/A		30
	Number of social service professionals participating in cross-border exchanges or activities	Output	Persons	Project reports	N/A		40
Stimulating employment through entrepreneurship and innovations	Number of people in the Programme area, who have received support in developing their employability and entrepreneurial	Result	Persons	Project reports	-		Total - 1500, youth - 700, pre-retirement age people - 300, other - 500.

	capacities, of whom: - youth; - pre-retirement age people; - other.						
	Number of implemented cross-border initiatives aimed at developing employability and/or entrepreneurial capacities of people, including youth and pre-retirement age people, in the Programme area	Output	Initiatives	Project reports	-		20
Increasing capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges	Number of institutions involved in joint decision making process with regards to the common challenges	Result	Institutions	Project reports	16		25
	Number of cross-border cooperation initiatives involving joint/coordinated decision making in the sphere of tackling common challenges	Output	Initiatives	Project reports	7		10
Strengthening	Number of	Result	Organisations	Project	-		15

society	organisations that have established or maintained durable cross-border cooperation links			reports			
	Number of implemented joint actions by non-governmental actors of the Programme area in the fields of culture, sport, education, social services, etc.	Output	Actions	Project reports	-		30
Promoting and preserving cultural heritage and traditional skills	Number of tourists accommodated per 1000 population in the Programme area	Result	Persons	Official statistics	329		394
	Number of improved cultural and historical sites as a direct consequence of programme support	Output	Cultural and historical sites	Project reports	-		15
	Number of professionals in the fields of culture, cultural and historical heritage and tourism participating in trainings and/or other joint	Output	Persons	Project reports	-		200



	activities						
	Number of institutions using Programme support for promoting local culture and preserving historical heritage	Output	Institutions	Project reports			50
Enhancing border-crossing efficiency	Number of border crossing points with increased throughput capacity	Result	Border-crossing points	Project reports	-		3
	Number of border management sites renovated/upgraded	Output		Project reports	-		6
	Number of employees of border crossing points who have participated in training and/or experience exchange activities	Output	Persons	Project reports	-		40

The Commission shall have access to all monitoring reports and can, at any moment, launch monitoring of the Programme or of a part thereof. The results of the latter shall be communicated to the JMC and the MA and may consequently lead to adjustments in the Programme.

In compliance with Article 77 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, every year by 15 February the MA shall submit to the Commission an annual implementation report approved by the JMC, including technical and financial part covering the preceding accounting year. The technical part shall describe:

- The progress achieved in implementing the Programme and its priorities;

- The detailed list of signed contracts as well as the list of selected projects not yet contracted, including reserve lists;
- The TA activities carried out;
- The measures undertaken to monitor and evaluate projects, their results and actions undertaken to remedy the problems identified;
- The implemented communication activities.

The financial part shall be prepared in accordance with Article 68(2) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014.

The MA by 30 September 2024 shall also submit to the Commission a final implementation report approved by the JMC, containing the same elements as required in the case of annual implementation reports.

In accordance with Article 20(3) of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the JTS will be delegated certain tasks of the MA related to operational management of the Programme under the responsibility of the MA. The tasks delegated to the JTS shall be formally recorded in writing. The MA shall monitor execution of tasks delegated to JTS (through regular reporting by the JTS, access to and screening of the working procedures of JTS and verifications).

### **9.3.2. Evaluation**

The indicative evaluation plan of the Programme for its whole duration consists of three evaluations carried out by external evaluators (contracted by the JTS according to the public procurement procedure), namely:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) (prior the approval of the Programme document by the Commission);
- Mid-term evaluation of the Programme (provisionally in 2019). The results of this evaluation shall be communicated to the JMC and MA and may, consequently, lead to adjustments in the Programme;
- Ex post evaluation of the Programme (in the year following the end of the implementation phase of the projects financed by the Programme).

The Commission shall have access to all evaluation reports and may carry out *ad hoc* evaluations (at any time) of the Programme or a part thereof. The results of these exercises shall be communicated to the JMC and MA and may, consequently, lead to adjustments in the Programme. Furthermore, the JMC and MA may consider necessary to carry out their own *ad hoc* evaluations of the Programme at any of its stages.

## **9.4. Verification of Expenditure and Audit**

### **9.4.1. Verification of Expenditure**

In accordance with Article 26 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the MA (with assistance from the JTS) shall ensure that bodies designated to carry out control tasks have carried out the verifications whether:

- services, supplies or works have been performed, delivered and/or installed;
- expenditure declared by the beneficiaries has been paid by them and that this complies with applicable law, Programme rules and conditions for support of the projects.

The above-mentioned verifications shall include the following procedures:

- administrative verifications for each payment request by beneficiaries;
- on-the-spot project verifications on a sample basis (their frequency and coverage shall be proportionate to the amount of the grant to a project and the level of risk identified by these verifications and audits by the AA for the management and control systems as a whole).

### **9.4.2. Audit**

In accordance with Article 28 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the Audit Authority (AA) shall, within 9 months of the signature of the first financing agreement, submit an audit strategy for performance of audits to the Commission. The audit strategy shall set out the audit methodology on the annual accounts and on projects, the sampling method for audits on projects and the planning of audits for the current accounting year and the two subsequent accounting years. The audit strategy shall be updated annually from 2017 until end 2024.

The AA shall ensure that audits are carried out on the management and control systems, on an appropriate sample of projects and on the annual accounts of the Programme, in compliance with internationally accepted auditing standards. In addition, the AA shall draw up an audit opinion on the annual accounts for the preceding accounting year and an annual audit report.

In accordance with Article 25 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the AA shall assess the compliance of the management and control systems, including the role of intermediate bodies therein, with the designation criteria laid down in Annex I to the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014 (Implementing Rules). Where existing audit and control results show that the designated authority no longer complies with the criteria referred to above, the Member State shall, at an appropriate level, set the necessary remedial action and fix a period of probation according to the severity of the problem, during which such remedial action shall be taken.

In accordance with Article 26 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the MA shall set up procedures to ensure the proper keeping of all documents regarding expenditure and audits

required to ensure a suitable audit trail. Furthermore, the MA shall ensure that beneficiaries involved in project implementation maintain either a separate accounting system or a suitable accounting code for all transactions relating to a project.

## **9.5. Financial Responsibilities and Recoveries**

The participating countries shall prevent, detect and correct irregularities, including fraud, and recover amounts unduly paid, together with any interest pursuant Article 74 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014 on their territories. They shall notify these irregularities without delay to the MA and the Commission and keep them informed of the progress of related administrative and legal proceedings.

According to Article 75 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the MA shall recover from the Lead Beneficiary the amounts unduly paid together with any interest on late payments. The concerned beneficiaries shall repay the Lead Beneficiary the amounts unduly paid in accordance with the partnership agreement signed between them.

In accordance with Article 74 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, where the recovery relates to a breach of legal obligations on the part of the MA stemming from the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014 and Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002, the MA shall reimburse amounts concerned to the Commission.

Where the recovery relates to systemic deficiencies in the Programme management and control systems, the MA shall be responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the European Commission. In such cases, the liabilities among the participating countries shall be apportioned in proportion to the country's in question share of expenditure incurred that was affected by systemic deficiencies in the Programme's management and control systems.

Where the recovery relates to a claim against a beneficiary established in the Member State (Lithuania or Latvia) and the MA is unable to recover the debt, the Member State in which beneficiary is established shall pay the due amount to the MA and claim it back from the beneficiary.

Where the recovery relates to a claim against a beneficiary established in the Republic of Belarus and the MA is unable to recover the debt, the level of responsibility of the Republic of Belarus shall be such as it is laid down in the relevant financing agreement between the EU and the Republic of Belarus.

In accordance with Article 31 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, the National Authorities (NAs) shall recover to the MA the amounts unduly paid to the beneficiaries operating on their territories, where these amounts cannot be recovered. In the case of Belarus' NA, the terms of liability for recovery of the amounts unduly paid to the beneficiaries operating in the Belarusian part of the Programme area, where these amounts cannot be recovered, as well as

the mechanisms for such recovery, will be stipulated in the Financing Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the European Commission on implementation of the Programme.

The detailed description of the recovery procedures will be provided in the Programme management and control systems description.

## **9.6. Communication Strategy**

### **9.5.1. Overall Communication Strategy**

The JTS and the project beneficiaries shall be responsible for ensuring adequate visibility of the EU contribution to the Programme and its projects in order to strengthen public awareness of the EU action and create a consistent image of the EU support in all participating countries. The JTS shall also ensure that the communication strategy and visibility measures undertaken by the project beneficiaries comply with the Commission's guidance.

Routine tasks in ensuring timely and efficient implementation of communication measures shall be delegated to the JTS. For this purpose, a person responsible for communication shall be appointed at the JTS. The JTS shall be assisted in carrying out communication activities by the BOs in Latvia and Belarus.

The Programme will have its visual identity, consisting of the following main elements: EU flag and the Programme logo, and the information about the EU funding. These elements will be applied to the entire brand book of the Programme: letterheads, official blanks, presentations, information stands, etc.

A large range of communication measures shall be employed with the aim of ensuring spread of adequate information to the following target groups:

- General public;
- Potential and actual applicants;
- Project beneficiaries;
- Public authorities and non-governmental organisations;
- Economic and social partners;
- EU authorities.

The following communication channels are planned to be used (ensuring, *inter alia*, spread of information in national languages):

- Website of the Programme;
- Electronic communication tools;

- Events;
- Mass media;
- Promotion and information gadgets and publications;
- Social media.

The communication strategy of the Programme will be implemented in the following stages:

- Ensuring efficient communication among the implementing bodies of the Programme, social and economic partners, the EC;
- Informing the general public and all potential applicants about the Programme and its calls for proposals;
- Providing information on application and assistance in forming partnership to all potential applicants;
- Assistance in preparation for contracting and project implementation to all beneficiaries, including clear guidance on project promotion and Programme visibility requirements;
- Promoting of the Programme achievements to the public.

In order to ensure the transparency of the usage of EU funds, the list of projects, funded under the Programme will be published on the website of the Programme.

Capitalisation will be used in order to make the promotion of Programme results efficient.

*Table 24. Communication strategy*

Visibility measure	Main target group	Frequency of usage
Information campaign publicising the launch of call for proposals	Potential applicants, as well as general public	For each call for proposals
Publishing the list of beneficiaries and projects, as well as amount of public funding	General public	Following calls for proposals
Partner search events	Potential applicants	For each call for proposals
Information and training events on preparation of applications	Potential applicants	For each call for proposals

Training of project management and reporting	Beneficiaries	For each call for proposals
Consulting of applicants and beneficiaries	Applicants and beneficiaries	On regular basis
Written material and publications	Potential applicants, applicants, beneficiaries and general public	Regular
Articles and press releases	Potential applicants, applicants, beneficiaries and general public	For each call for proposals/ during implementation
Programme internet page	Potential applicants, applicants, beneficiaries and general public	Permanent
Visual identity signs	Potential applicants, applicants, beneficiaries and general public	As required by visibility rules
Promotion of Programme results	General public	Permanent

### 9.5.2. Indicative Information and Communication Plan

During the first year of the implementation of the Programme, the following preparation for information and communication activities of the Programme will be done:

- Brand book will be developed (logo, blanks, letterheads, presentation forms, etc.);
- Website will start operating;
- Programme pages will open on several most popular social media channels;
- Set of promotion gadgets inviting potential applicants to visit the website of the Programme will be produced;
- Introductory brochure or leaflet presenting the Programme and its possibilities will be published;
- Promotion video clip, inviting potential applicants to submit their applications, will be prepared.

The Programme will spread the news about the possibilities of the EU funding for joint cross-border cooperation actions through the following means:

- Articles and advertisements in press and internet news portals;

- Communication campaign via the websites and other communication channels of the national, regional and municipal governmental institutions, as well as federations, associations and umbrella organisations of potential applicant organisations;
- Communication campaign through the website, mobile phone application and social media pages of the Programme;
- Launching conference and partner search forum;
- First national seminars for potential applicants.

All the information and communication actions will equally cover the eligible territories of Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus.

### **9.7. Use of Technical Assistance**

The purpose of the Technical Assistance (TA) is to finance activities that are necessary for the effective and smooth preparation, management, monitoring, evaluation, information, communication, networking, complaint resolution, control and audit of the Programme and activities to reinforce the administrative capacity for implementing the Programme. Therefore, the TA should be used for the needs, of both the Programme management structures and project beneficiaries. In accordance with Article 34 of the Regulation (EU) No 897/2014, no more than 10 per cent of the Union's total contribution allocated to the Programme shall be used for the TA purposes. The following indicative activities are to be financed within the scope of TA:

- Activities related to the functioning of the management structures (staff, office and equipment costs, procurement, organisation of meetings, travel and accommodation costs, etc.);
- Information, publicity and awareness raising measures (publications, events, networking, websites, media, visual identity, etc.);
- Preparation, assessment and selection of projects (administration of calls of proposals, elaboration of the Programme documentation, contracting of external experts, etc.);
- Activities related to the enhancement of the beneficiaries' capacity to absorb the Programme's assistance (consultations, seminars and trainings, partner search events, dissemination of good practices, actions aimed at the reduction of the administrative burden on beneficiaries, etc.);
- Development and operation of databases and computerised data exchange systems;
- Monitoring activities (setting up and operation of a monitoring system, on-site checks of projects, contracting of external experts, etc.);



- Control and audit activities (sample checks of projects, internal and external audit, etc.);
- Evaluation activities (contracting of external experts, preparation of relevant reports and studies, etc.).

Technical assistance contracts by the institutions of the Programme established in Latvia and Lithuania shall be awarded following the applicable Latvian and Lithuanian public procurement laws. The procurement rules applicable to the contracts awarded by the institutions established in the Republic of Belarus shall be defined in the Financing Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Belarus.

Procurement by the Branch Offices shall be limited to ordinary running costs and costs for communication and visibility activities.

### **9.8. Description of the IT System**

In order to ensure adequate storage and processing of the programme and project data, a secure limited access computerised programme management system, i.e. the Programme database, will be used by the MA and the JTS. The database will operate on the basis of project level data and will be used for storing and processing information encompassing full life-cycle of the Programme. The database will be instrumental in reception and filling in of project documents, project assessment, reporting, monitoring and evaluation, making payments and aggregating data on the programme level, among others. In addition, information on the projects of the Programme and their achievements will be fed to the KEEP database - the source of aggregated information on the projects and beneficiaries of EU programmes dedicated to cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation in Europe (covering the period of 2000-2006, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020).

### **9.9. Use of Languages**

The official language of the Programme shall be English. Thus, all the main documents (e.g. applications, reports, etc.) shall be drawn up in English. However, additional documents required while submitting the application form, supporting documentation for the reports might be submitted in national languages (Latvian, Lithuanian, Belarusian and Russian).

## 10.COORDINATION

### 10.1. Prevention of Double Financing

The funding of the Programme provided under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) shall be coordinated with the other existing EU and national funding instruments. In the 2014-2020 programming period double financing prevention and control system will be an integral part of the EU Structural funds planning and implementation system. In the process of double financing prevention and control the systematic approach will be adopted, meaning that corresponding procedures of control and supervision will be performed at every stage of the project and programme administration. The integrity of these actions shall ensure the adequate management of double financing risk.

In order to avoid double financing, some particular measures shall be taken. Firstly, a declaration shall be signed by all beneficiaries stating that the proposed action has not been financed (neither in full, nor in part) from other international, national, regional or EU financial instruments or programmes. Furthermore, while assessing project applications the MA and the JTS, in cooperation with the NAs, shall check the eligibility of project beneficiaries, as well as of proposed actions, in order to ensure that projects are not overlapping with other publicly financed activities.

Furthermore, national EU structural funds (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and Cohesion Fund) monitoring information system (*abbr. in Lithuanian - SFMIS*) will be used by all the institutions in Lithuania administering the EU structural funds (the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania and relevant intermediate institutions). The system allows accumulating, exchanging and analysing information on programmes and projects funded by EU structural funds and implemented in Lithuania and, thus, helps ensure the complementarity and decrease the risk of double financing. The eligibility of Lithuanian beneficiaries' actions under this Programme shall be checked by the MA/JTS using the data from SFMIS. The system will allow checking whether the partner in question has been involved in other similar projects.

Furthermore, the Partnership Agreement of Lithuania envisages monitoring of complementarity of programmes financed from all the five ESI funds and strategic programmes financed from the national budget. In 2012, Lithuanian Government approved the National Development Programme (NDP), aimed at implementation of the Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030". This programme encompasses the most important national strategic policy provisions and the principal EU policy provisions laid out in the strategy "Europe 2020", lists the interventions financed from the different funding sources, both national budget and ESI funds. The coordination is ensured through monitoring of implementation of priorities set in the NDP, in which all institutions responsible for implementation of various programmes and plans take part.

Apart from the EU structural funds, coordination is also sought with the other ESI funds, i.e. EAFRD and EMFF. The representatives of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania which is acting as the Managing Authority of the Programme, are also members of the Monitoring Committees for the Lithuanian Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 financed from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and for the OP financed from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Therefore the coordination in regard to actions funded under the Programme and EAFRD same as EMFF shall be ensured through involvement of representatives of the MA.

In order to verify the eligibility of Latvian and Belarusian beneficiaries and projects, the MA and the JTS shall cooperate with the NAs in Latvia and Belarus.

The JTS, when necessary, shall contact the Latvian NA, in order to receive the necessary information on eligibility of Latvian partners and projects. Latvian NA may use the direct access to the national EU Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund Management Information System (*abbr. in Latvian - ES SFKF VIS*), as well as to other available systems created for other financial instruments (e.g. *Documentation, Reporting and Information System, DoRIS, for EEZ, Norwegian Finance Instrument*) and specific cross-cutting guidelines developed for the EU funds' supervisory institutions in Latvia (e.g. "*The Matrix of the prevention of double financing of EU funds, the European Economic Area, the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, Swiss-Latvian Cooperation Programme and other financial instruments*"). The above mentioned systems and the Matrix used in an integrated way will allow checking whether the partner in question has been involved in other similar projects.

According to Belarusian national requirements, all Belarusian Lead Beneficiaries or Beneficiaries who obtain project funding from any foreign/international organisation/structure/donor are registered in the Department for Cooperation with International Organisations and Coordination of Technical Assistance of the Ministry of Economy. Generally, the registration procedure includes approval and registration of the project, and approval of the list of goods, works and services provided for the implementation of international technical assistance projects/programmes. The JTS, when necessary, shall contact the Belarusian NA in order to receive the required information from the register described above.

## **10.2. Synergies between the Programme and National Programmes**

In order to ensure synergies between actions foreseen under the Programme and those financed from other European Structural and Investment (ESI) funds, the number of thematic objectives of the Programme has been restricted to a maximum of 4 thematic objectives. Limited thematic scope of the Programme contributes to the stronger concentration on the most important issues, as well as to the synergy with ESI funds. At the same time, it allows for better coordination and complementarity with other funds and operational programmes.

Furthermore, it is important to ensure the coordination of thematic objectives and investment priorities of this Programme with those of the programmes and projects funded by other instruments of external assistance in each participating country. The analysis of strategic documents of the participating countries relevant in the period of 2014-2020 has been conducted. The latter has revealed that even though many interventions of the Programme are similar to those supported under national programmes and plans (financed from ESI funds), there is significant difference in focus of these interventions, thus, allowing for important synergies.

In Latvia's case, the Programme has thematic relations with several other programmes and instruments of external assistance for 2014-2020, including, *inter alia*, Operational Programme "Growth and Employment" 2014-2020, Rural Development programme 2014-2020, Action Programme for Fisheries Development 2014-2020, Latvian-Swiss Cooperation Programme and programmes financed under European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway Financial Mechanisms.

At least 7 out of 9 priority directions of ***Latvia's Operational Programme (OP) "Growth and Employment" for the EU Structural Assistance 2014-2020*** are closely linked to the thematic objectives and investment priorities of the Programme. Under the OP's *Priority 1 "Research, technology development and innovations"* it is planned to provide support for capacity building in science, research and innovation, as well as for applied research and commercialization of research results, improvement of research infrastructure and facilities, promotion of international cooperation, cooperation between scientific institutions and the private sector, etc. *Priority 2 "Accessibility of ICT, e-government and services"* aims at improving the electronic communications infrastructure, thus, promoting economic activity, public and private integrated ICT solutions and Latvia's integration into the joint European digital market. Both of these priorities, together with the directly related *Priority 3 "Competitiveness of SMEs"*, correspond to *Priority 1.2. "Stimulating employment through entrepreneurship and innovations"* of the CBC Programme.

The overall objective of *Priority 4 "The transition to a low carbon economy in all sectors"* is to reduce the consumption of energy, promote efficient and sustainable energy use in all sectors. Under the *Priority 5 "Environmental protection and efficient use of resources"* support to activities aimed at adaptation to climate change is planned. Both priorities are in line with *Priority 2.1. "Increasing capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges"* of the CBC Programme.

*Priority 9 "Social inclusion and combating poverty"* foresees the activation of disadvantaged working-age population and reduction of barriers of entering the labour market, together with the professional development of social work, social services and health care quality, including the transition from institutional care system to community-based services. The latter could be further developed under *Priority 1.1. "Enhancing the access to social and other services for vulnerable groups"* of the Programme.

**Latvian Rural Development programme for 2014-2020** has clear synergies with the Programme, as well. Environment and innovations, which are addressed by the Programme, are the horizontal objectives of LAP. *Priority 1 “Promotion the transfer of knowledge and innovations in agriculture, forestry and rural areas”* and *Priority 2 “Improvement of farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture in all regions, and promotion of innovative farm technologies and sustainable forest management”* go hand in hand with *Priority 1.2* of the Programme, providing an opportunity to disseminate and multiply the outcomes of the Programme’s projects further in the rural areas of Latvia. *Priority 4 “Restoration, preservation and enhancement of ecosystems associated with agriculture and forestry”* is in line with *Priority 2.1*, while *Priority 6 “Promotion of social inclusion, reduction of poverty and economic development in rural areas”* corresponds to 1 TO *“Promotion of social inclusion and fight against poverty”* of the Programme.

Synergies can also be found between the Programme and **Action Programme for Fisheries Development for 2014-2020** (regarding reduction of negative impact on the environment, promotion of R&D and innovation), **Latvian-Swiss Cooperation Programme** (regarding social development), **European Economic Area (EEA)** and **Norway Financial Mechanisms** (regarding development of cultural heritage and promotion of innovations).

Some priorities of **Lithuania’s Operational Programme for the EU Funds’ Investment in 2014-2020** have similar focus to that of thematic objectives and investment priorities of the Programme. *Priority 9 “Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty”* encompasses investments to social infrastructure and transfer from institutional to community-based services, as well as active social inclusion by enhancing participation of older people in labour market (corresponding to *Priority 1.1. “Enhancing the access to social and other services for vulnerable groups”* of the Programme).

*Priority 10 “Society-oriented smart public administration”* envisages investments to the enhancement of institutional capacities and more effective public administration (in line with *Priority 2.1. “Increasing capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges”* of the Programme).

*Priority 5 “Environment, sustainable use of natural resources and adaptation to climate change”* foresees enhancement of capacities to adapt to climate change (corresponding to *Priority 2.1. “Increasing capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges”* of the Programme), and protecting, promoting and developing cultural and natural heritage (in line with *Priority 3.1. “Promoting and preserving cultural heritage and traditional skills”* of the Programme).

*Priority 7 “Promoting quality employment and participation in labour market”* encompasses integration of youth into labour market, while *Priority 9 “Educating the society and strengthening the potential of human resources”* - training of labour force and adaptation of education systems to the needs of labour market, *Priority 1 “Strengthening R&D and innovations”* - cooperation between business and education, and *Priority 3 “Promoting*

*competitiveness of small and medium sized business*” - promotion of entrepreneurship and creation of new businesses (all in line with *Priority 1.2. “Stimulating employment through entrepreneurship and innovations”* of the CBC Programme).

***Lithuanian Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020*** also has some synergies with the Programme. *Priority 1 “Promotion of transfer of knowledge and innovations in agriculture, forestry and rural areas”* involves support for strengthening ties between education and business, as well as capacity-building and promotion of entrepreneurship in rural areas (in line with *Priority 1.2. “Stimulating Employment through Entrepreneurship and Innovations”* of the Programme). *Priority 6 “Promotion of social inclusion, reduction of poverty and economic development in rural areas”* envisages provision of basic services (necessary for economic, social and cultural development) in rural areas (in line with *Priority 1.1. “Enhancing the Access to Social and Other Services for Vulnerable Groups”* of the Programme), as well as preservation and development of cultural, natural and historical heritage (in line with *Priority 3.1. “Promoting and Preserving Cultural and Historical Heritage and Traditional Skills”* of the Programme).

Synergies can also be found between the Programme and ***Operational Programme for the Lithuanian Fisheries Sector for 2014-2020*** (regarding reduction of negative impact on the environment), ***Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme*** (regarding social development), ***European Economic Area (EEA)*** and ***Norway Financial Mechanisms*** (regarding development of cultural heritage).

In Belarus’ case, the EU is the key international donor. Assistance for Belarus is granted under the Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013 and focused directly and indirectly on supporting the needs of the population and democratisation. The bilateral allocations funded under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), whose continuation is ENI, were directed towards supporting cooperation in sectors of mutual interest and those most directly benefitting the citizens (border management, regional development, environment, energy efficiency, green economy, food safety, etc.), putting an emphasis on civil society participation. These allocations have had an impact on citizens at large who benefit from improvements in key sectors, have a wide outreach across the country and very strong reliance on regional and municipal activities. Additional opportunities arise from participation of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) multilateral dimension within the thematic platforms and flagship initiatives. Belarus also participates in some regional projects, mainly in the area of environment, education and cross-border cooperation. Bilateral assistance to Belarus is complemented by thematic and regional programmes in the following fields: education (Tempus, Erasmus Mundus), the eradication of landmines, waste governance, air quality, nuclear safety - Chernobyl and TAIEX. Furthermore, special additional financial measures were allocated for support to civil society. There is no obvious overlapping between the Programme and other donor activities in Belarusian part of the Programme area.

Social inclusion and local/regional economic development are emphasized in the *Strategy Paper and Multiannual Indicative Programme for EU support to Belarus (2014-2017)* as two out of three priority sectors of intervention. The former aims at inclusion of vulnerable groups by promoting equal opportunities in, *inter alia*, access to education, jobs and healthcare, corresponding to *Priority 1.1. “Enhancing the access to social and other services for vulnerable groups”*. The latter targets attempts to contribute to sustainable social and economic development, in line with *Priority 1.2. “Stimulating employment through entrepreneurship and innovations”* and *Priority 2.2. “Strengthening society”*. Thus, the important synergies between the above-mentioned document and the Programme exist.

TO2 provides synergy with activities within the first thematic platform of the *EaP “Democracy, good governance & stability (including Justice, Liberty and Security (JLS))”*. *Priority 2.1 “Increasing capacity of local and regional authorities to tackle common challenges”* corresponds to the EaP Flagship Initiatives “5. Prevention of, preparedness for, and response to natural and man-made disasters” and “6. Good environmental governance” (addressing the strengthening of environmental governance). Oshmyany, Rogachev (Grodno Region), Polotsk and Braslav (Vitebsk Region) in the core regions, and Molodechno, Slutsk (Minsk Region) and Chausy (Mogilyov Region) in the adjoining regions are signatories of the *Covenant of Mayors (CoM)*. Taking into consideration the growing interest of Belarusian municipalities in this initiative, actions under *Priority 2.1* may also contribute to the implementation of municipal *Sustainable Energy Action Plans*. *Priority 2.2 “Strengthening society”* provides certain synergy with EaP fourth thematic platform “Contacts between people” (addressing civil society).

Actions under TO3 “Promotion of local culture and preservation of historical heritage” of the Programme are in line with the specific objectives of the *EaP Culture Programme*:

- to support and promote cultural policy reforms at the governmental level, build capacities of cultural organisations and improve “professionalization” of the culture sector in the region;
- to contribute to exchange of information, experience and best practices among cultural operators at the regional level and with the EU;
- to support regional initiatives/partnerships, which demonstrate positive cultural contributions to economic development, social inclusion, conflict resolution and intercultural dialogue.

Actions under TO4 “Promotion of border management, and border security” have synergy with activities within the EaP *Flagship Initiative “1. Integrated Border Management Programme”* which includes promotion of alignment to EU standards (a prerequisite for progress on the mobility), as well as the principles of Belarus’ cooperation with International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (targeted towards assisting in meeting the growing operational challenges of migration management).

It is expected that the implementation of the *Component 2 “Development of competences and capacities of Belarusian regional and local authorities in regional and local development management”* within the frames of the ***EU Project “Support to regional and local development in Belarus”*** (2013-2016) will provide solid basis for actions to be supported under TO1, TO2 and TO3 of the CBC Programme.

The existence of similar interventions of the Programme and those of national programmes and projects financed from ESI funds (in the case of all three participating countries) confirms the relevance and importance of the issues that are addressed by these interventions. Nevertheless, there is a crucial difference between the focus of the Programme and national programmes financed from ESI funds (in particular ERDF, CF and ESF).. Investments under the latter are mostly concentrated on large-scale developments on national level, addressing state-wide problems and challenges, and financing activities carried out mostly by major actors in specific fields, thus, lacking attention to issues on regional, let alone local, level and smaller beneficiaries. In contrast, the Programme aims to fill this gap by focusing on the development of the most disadvantaged regions, in particular those bordering the neighbouring countries, and seeks to effectively exploit cross-border cooperation for solving common challenges. Therefore, the most important fields will be approached from both national and regional levels, creating important synergies.