

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING
OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMISSION FOR CROSS BORDER
COOPERATION
OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA**

28 October, 2021

Venue: Online meeting

Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania;

Ministry of the Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia.

Beginning of the Meeting 9:00

End of the Meeting 11:45

OPENING OF THE MEETING

Chairman of the Meeting Mr. Arnoldas Abramavičius, Vice-Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania and Co-Chairman, Mr. Artūrs Toms Plešs Minister of the Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia, opened the Meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission for Cross Border Cooperation of the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Latvia (hereinafter – the IGC).

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Parties approved the proposed IGC agenda (Annex 1).

1. THE MIGRATION CRISIS CAUSED BY THE BELARUSSIAN REGIME

Vice-Minister of the Interior A. Abramavičius presented to the members of the commission and the guests of the meeting the latest updates on the migration situation artificially caused by the Belarussian regime. The Vice-Minister noted that joint action by EU Member States and EU institutions has contributed to the normalization of the situation. However, it was pointed out, that the countries of our region in particular need to continue to monitor the situation and its development closely.

The Vice-Minister stressed that by consolidating efforts and coordinating actions, stabilization and pan-European attention to the problem has been achieved. The joint result is visible in the Conclusions of the European Council of 21 and 22 October 2021. The European Council invited the

European Commission to propose any necessary changes to the EU's legal framework and concrete measures underpinned by adequate financial support to ensure an immediate and appropriate response to any attempt by third countries to instrumentalize migrants for political purposes.

Mr Gatis Švika, Director of the Policy Department of the Ministry of the Interior, emphasized and agreed that the situation at the border with Belarus must be seen primarily as a hybrid attack by Lukashenko regime.

Mr Švika gave an updated information to the committee regarding the situation at LV border. Even if at the moment situation seemed to be stable it was stressed that further work to elaborate specific instruments to counter a hybrid act is necessary at the EU level.

The parties agreed to continue to work closely together to coordinate the response to the Belarusian hybrid action and to mobilize like-minded EU Member States to adapt EU's legal framework in order to respond to hybrid threats and possible similar challenges in the future.

2. TRANSPORT ISSUES:

2.1. OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESS CONCERNING TRANSPORT ISSUES DISCUSSED DURING THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE COMMISSION:

Presentation by Mr. Gytis Mažeika; Head of Development and International Cooperation Group, Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Lithuania, reported on the status of the transport issues discussed during the previous IGC meeting:

a) Reconstruction of border roads.

Mr. Gytis Mažeika *informed on the implementation and results of cross border cooperation project within INTERREG Latvia-Lithuania programme "Easycrossing/Improvement of Cross Border Road Infrastructure for Well-Connected Regional Centres and Facilitated Labour Mobility in the Border Areas". The reconstruction of three road sections in Lithuania and plans for implementing bicycle coastal lane were presented.*

b) Implementation of the project "Rail Baltica"

Mr. Gytis Mažeika *reported on significant progress accomplished in implementation of the project "Rail Baltica" since the last Commission meeting in 2017.*

Parties agreed that the issue falls beyond areas of the IGC competence and is to be further discussed in trilateral format between the Baltic States.

c) Possibilities of renewal of train traffic on cross-border section Rengė-Mažeikiai

Mr. Gytis Mažeika *presented the situation concerning renewal of train traffic on cross-border section Rengė-Mažeikiai. The issue is considered to be resolved.*

d) Agreement on the establishment of flight information region between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

Mr. Gytis Mažeika reiterated the willingness of the Lithuanian side to continue discussions on possible revision of the Agreement with the view to update its provisions, as the ICAO and EU legislative environment has evolved noticeably since 1998, when the above-mentioned Agreement was signed.

Mr. Dins Merirands, Deputy State Secretary of the Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Latvia informed that Latvia maintains that all issues concerning implementation of the said agreement, and providing of air navigation services in the border area of two flight information regions were solved in the three parties negotiations including Eurocontrol, and the respective agreement between Latvian and Lithuanian institutions was signed in 2019. Currently there is no subject for discussion.

Parties agreed that the issue falls beyond the areas of the IGC competence and is to be further resolved by the responsible ministries of Latvia and Lithuania.

Further, Mr. Dins Merirands emphasized the importance of INTERREG programme for improvement of local roads in cross - border areas and described possible directions for future cooperation between national road authorities of Latvia and Lithuania. Mr. Merirands provided information on development of cycling infrastructure along EuroVelo13 route in Latvia.

2.2. IMPROVEMENT OF CROSS-BORDER CONNECTIONS

- The mayors of Skuodas and Visaginas district municipalities initiated IGC discussion on the new issues of improvement of cross border connections. **Necessity of the reconstruction of roads on the Skuodas - Liepāja route;**

Parties reported on the status of the roads on the Skuodas-Liepāja route as well as shared information on the plans of reconstruction of the roads in the route. The IGC emphasized the need to make every effort to ensure good quality road transport infrastructure for the residents of the border regions of both parties allowing smooth movement between the border cities.

Parties agreed to take the efforts for the reconstruction of the roads on the route Skuodas-Liepāja.

- **Possibilities of renewal of train traffic on cross border sections (Visaginas-Daugavpils).** Lithuanian side reported on the use of passenger rail transport between Lithuania and Latvia.

Mr. Dins Merirands informed that in the recent past rail passengers traffic on cross-border connection Visaginas – Daugavpils was ensured by Lithuanian national rail company “Lietuvos geležinkeliai” operating passenger train routes Daugavpils – Vilnius and Vilnius - Daugavpils going through Visaginas station.

Accordingly to Latvian state railway technical inspection (SRTI) rendered information in order to reach the compliance with the EU legislative bodies prescriptions relevant to rail passengers rights ensuring “Lietuvos geležinkeliai” was obliged till 1st April of 2020 to fulfill SRTI issued list of prescriptions.

In order to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic spreading both states – Latvia and Lithuania halted international rail passengers traffic including abovementioned routes – and the compliance with the above mentioned SRTI list of prescriptions was not actual at the 1st of April 2020.

Currently, JSC „Pasažieru vilciens“ has considered possibilities to extend the existing route Riga-Daugavpils till Vilnius and has indicated next steps and necessary solutions to implement this option. Information on the proposal and outstanding matters to be solved was provided.

At the time being “Lietuvos geležinkeliai” expressed interest to renew of abovementioned routes and already has made some steps in the process of solving of above mentioned noncompliance issue.

Both parties agreed on the need of additional publicity to promote the passenger route Visaginas – Daugavpils for the residents of the border regions and agreed to consider proposals for further actions.

2.3. ESTABLISHMENT OF A SYSTEM FOR DRIVERS TO MOVE AROUND THE BALTIC STATES WITH ONLY IDENTITY DOCUMENTS

Mr. Dins Merirands presented the proposal on the possibility for drivers to move in the territory of Lithuania and Latvia without physically holding a driver's license and a vehicle registration certificate and possible ways and technical means of implementation of this idea.

Parties agreed to work on the setting up interconnected registers such EUCARIS, which allows to move in the territory of Lithuania and Latvia without physically holding a driver's license and a vehicle registration certificate.

3. CIVIL PROTECTION

3.1. COORDINATION OF PROCEDURES AND PLANS FOR THE MUTUAL CROSS-BORDER RESCUE OPERATIONS BETWEEN LATVIA AND LITHUANIA

Mr Gatis Švika, Director of the Policy Department of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia, and General Intars Zitāns, Deputy Chief of the State Fire and Rescue Service of the Republic of Latvia presented the necessity for Coordination of procedures and plans for the mutual cross-border rescue operations between Latvia and Lithuania.

Head of the International Cooperation Division of the Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania Ieva Monika Jankuvienė added some remarks and reflections concerning this issue.

Parties agreed to coordinate the cross-border rescue operations' procedures and plans on expert level among relevant institutions.

Informative part of IGC:

4. PERSPECTIVES OF COLLABORATION WITHIN INTERREG LATVIA-LITHUANIA CROSS BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME 2021–2027

Ms. Iruma Kravale, Director of Development Instruments Department of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia presented a brief status of the preparation of the cooperation programme including joint priorities for the new 2021–2027 Interreg cross border cooperation programme.

Ms. Deimantė Jankūnaitė, Ms. Deimantė Jankūnaitė, EU Investments and International Programmes Department; Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, added remarks concerning the joint priorities.

CLOSING OF THE IGC MEETING

Mr. Arnoldas Abramavičius, and Mr. Artūrs Toms Plešs thanked IGC participants for their input and exchange of views during the IGC meeting.

Mr. Arnoldas Abramavičius, and Mr. Artūrs Toms Plešs concluded that the next IGC meeting shall be held in Latvia on the basis of the rotation principle upon agreement of the parties. Mr. Arnoldas Abramavičius closed the IGC meeting.

The minutes have been prepared and signed in two copies.

Annexes:

1. Agenda of the IGC meeting;
2. List of participants.

Arnoldas Abramavičius

Artūrs Toms Plešs