

Acronym: **B2B**

**1. PRIORITY:** FACILITATION OF SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**1.1. Support strand:** Facilitation of socioeconomic development and support for entrepreneurship

**Project applicant:** Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Riga, Latvia)

**Project partners:** Belarussian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Minsk, Belarus), Panevezys Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts (Panevezys, Lithuania), Daugavpils University (Daugavpils, Latvia)

**Financial support:** LATVIA, LITHUANIA and BELARUS Cross-border Cooperation programme within the European Neighbourhood and Partnership instrument of 2007

**Aim** – to facilitate long-term cross-border cooperation and common innovative entrepreneurship, to balance the general conditions for regional business development, development of cross-border exchanges of good practices as well as the increase of circulation of goods and services.

**One of the project activities is a cross-border experience exchange, participation in activities that facilitate entrepreneurship in Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus.**



## PARTNERSHIP OF NEIGHBOURS



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This time we will tell about the experience exchange in Lithuania, city of Panevezys, and reflect opinions on common development trends, on cross-border cooperation and neighbour relations. In the meeting the construction industry in all three countries was discussed.

**Sigitas Gailiunas, president of the Panevezys Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts**

It is important that entrepreneurs from the construction sector participate in this project. We live close by each other - we are the closest neighbours. Lithuania and Belarus is separated by border. We don't have borders with Latvia, nevertheless we live in distinct countries. We think that we know it all, but in reality, when we need to sort out some issues it turns out we don't know many things, particularly, the international environment.

Market competition widens our perspectives both about Latvian and Belarus. Latvia already has the new currency - EURO. Lithuania will get it as from the new year. Belarus has different currency, as well as different entrepreneurship practices and culture. There is also a lot in common. All of us pursue business development, new partners, new markets to sell our goods and services to as well as investment in other countries. These fora give us an opportunity to learn about the business conditions in the neighbouring countries. It is an opportunity to meet with the potential partners and competitors. We learn about the work of builders, what materials we can buy in Latvia. Belarusian partners are interested and they ask, why only small quantities of the building materials produced in Latvia reach Belarus. Results are inevitable. The difficult political situation between Russia and Ukraine, that influences the whole world mobilises us to look for new opportunities. The participants of the forum gained new information from the bank analysts and their expanded horizons. We will have new contacts and new projects in the construction sector.

**Rimantas Mazhenis, director of "TikTas"**

We need such fora, because for Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus it is important to cooperate. We know each other well. The borders should not be an obstacle. In Lithuania we produce one type of goods, in Belarus - another. Together we can create good produce. We can show Belarusians the newest technologies, that are available in the European Union. Our company that manufactures energy efficient houses right now is active only in the Lithuanian



market. We are interested to get involved into the Scandinavian markets. The focus is also on other countries, with more severe winters, such as Latvia and Belarus.

**Juris Grinvalds, chairman of the board of the Building Materials Producers Association**

Firstly, it is a chance to meet. We will see what comes after. Statistics show that the majority of contacts do not bear fruit. At the same for at least some entrepreneurs to find their potential cooperation partners they need to network all the time. Secondly, it is a chance for three countries to cooperate in the construction sector.

The closest relations are among Latvia and Lithuania due to the single market of the European Union - no custom barriers exist as well legislation on building materials is identical. Cooperation is

needed because the domestic market of each country is relatively small for us to build a modern factory. Belarus is a potential export market, it is interesting for Latvia and Lithuania as a direction towards the east and further to Russia. In turn, for Belarusians it is a gate to Europe. I know a lot of businesses that successfully sell in Belarus the goods made in Latvia and vice versa.

Overall, we become more active. Our mistakes help us to make better decisions in the future. If we see mistakes made by others, we become even smarter.

**Valerij Rabec, the director of the corporate enterprise "Novopolockzhelezobeton" ("Новополоцкжелезобетон")**

The meeting allows the development of common principles for cooperation between the three countries, to network with the potential partners and address issues. When we meet in person it is easier to accomplish all that. Belarus right now is an open country. The construction industry is developing rapidly, considerable number of professional builders is needed. We already have experience in the area of building objects of large scale. I support the idea of such meetings and we would benefit from having them regularly.

In this forum I gained new contacts and information. We established cooperation with the Lithuanian colleagues: Lithuanians will supply building materials to Belarus. There are always some issues that need to be addressed when we get involved in new things. We need to cooperate closely, work hand in hand to address these issues. The most important is to have understanding at the governmental level.

**Vitalijus Satkevicius, the mayor of Panevezys**

Neighbours should cooperate and be friends. There are Lithuanians who work in Belarus and Latvia, especially in the construction sector. And vice versa - Latvians and Belarusians come to work here too. I think it is a good exchange of experiences. There are around 3300 different businesses in Panevezys. Out of these around 180 are active in the construction sector. In the new planning period these businesses will have a lot of work. We will need the help of our neighbours to make the city even more attractive. Panevezys celebrated its 511<sup>th</sup> birthday today. This year Panevezys is also the city of culture in Lithuania. It is a city of theatres - there are 4 theatres in the city: the grand theatre, the world known puppet theatre, the youth theatre and the music theatre. There is also an art gallery, photo gallery and a unique pottery collection. Panevezys is also a city of sport.