

RUSSIA AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

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To talk about cross-border cooperation in Russia one should take into account that this issue is very sensitive and subtle due to its two *fundamental characteristics*: it touches *competences of both the Federation and regions* and has impact on *both internal and external state policies*.

To change the status of cross-border cooperation of Russian regions from being a “*gray zone*” to an *officially recognized activity* the federal regulation is needed. First of all, the adoption of the federal law on cross-border cooperation is Russia’s obligation arising from the ratification of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities and Authorities. Furthermore, such a law will create a united legal framework of cross-border cooperation in the federal level and will provide regions with a basement for creating regional laws aimed to regulate border regions activities. The need to adopt such a law has been repeatedly declared by various policy-makers for over a decade, but up until now such a bill does not exist.

One of the most influential reasons for that situation is the *heterogeneity of opinion within the executive branch of power* in carrying out the cross-border cooperation policy. A significant step for solving that problem was made in September 2012 when the Russian Interagency Commission on Inter-territorial and Trans-frontier Cooperation was established. It is aimed to provide a platform for inter-ministerial discussions with presence of 16 federal authorities. The Statute on the Commission has a remark about the possibility to invite the Presidential representatives in the Federal districts of the Russian Federation to take part in the sessions together with Commission’s permanent participants but the Statute keeps silence about the representatives of the border regions administrations. Such neglecting of the regional governments’ point of view will obviously cause the wave of discontent and criticism from the border regions to the Commission’s initiatives.

The appearance of the above-mentioned Commission gives grounds to expect that the work on the law on cross-border cooperation will soon be resumed. Although it is not very realistic to expect the law to be adopted by the end of 2013, it is highly probable that the reactivation of interagency negotiations will lead to

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the introduction of a new bill, rather than to proposing amendments to the previous draft.

To be quickly adopted, a bill needs strong effective political lobby. Despite the fact that more than half of the subjects of the Russian Federation and most of their municipalities are highly interested in the creation of a unified official legal framework for cross-border cooperation, it is unlikely that in 2013 the topic of the border areas' status will receive active support from the top officials.

From geopolitical perspective *the highest priority of* cross-border cooperation will remain under *Russian-Ukrainian border*. After the welcome start of its demarcation in November 2012, the work will be continued and probably finished in 2013. The process of renovating and setting up new border crossing points in this part of Russian border will be the main activity of Rosgranitsa (The Federal Agency for the Development of the State Border Facilities of the Russian Federation) at least for next 5 years.

The question of deepening the collaboration in the most industrially developed Southern part of Russian-Ukrainian border will become more visible in the presidential agendas in both countries.

In 2013 it is likely to result in *structural and institutional changes* of Southern Russian-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation which might take the form of either an expansion of the existing "Donbass" Euroregion or the launch of a new Euroregion "Azov".

As for Russian-EU member-states cross-border cooperation, 2013 is the last year of current European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument Programs. All five ENPI-CBC programs with participation of Russia (Kolarctic-Russia, Karelia-Russia, South-East Finland-Russia, Estonia-Latvia-Russia and Lithuania-Poland-Russia) usually are treated as a new milestone in Russia-EU cross-border cooperation because it was the first format which included co-financing of projects by the Russian side. The significance of this change consists in the fact that Russia began to use not only administrative power but also *financial incentives* to promote its interests in the border regions of the EU member-states.

The Russia's political consent about the need for continuing cooperation in the same mode and level of intensity has been already announced. The crucial point of the Russian priority during the first round of negotiations about new

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ENPI-CBC programs was keeping the equal participation status of the subjects of the Russian Federation. The fact that the EU negotiators agreed with this approach indicates that in 2013 the *agreement about the new programs will be signed*.

With a high level of credibility we can say that next ENPI-CBC program period (2014-2010 years) will strengthen the importance of switch from cross-border cooperation projects with people-oriented content to projects with sufficient investment component and *increase the weight of the infrastructural criterion* in the whole procedure of project selection.

Thus, in 2013 one can expect that the need to negotiate the issue of cross-border cooperation will require to present a clear unified position of Russian side and will be a great opportunity to check the institutional capacity of the Russian Interagency Commission, while the most powerful regional actors of cross-border cooperation will try to promote their interests regardless of Commission's performance.