

## **Overview of the work of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly in 2012**

Under the Lithuanian presidency in the Baltic Assembly the BA Education, Science and Culture Committee focused on the following priority area: sustainable and integrated Baltic (and Baltic-Nordic) research and innovation area, following the model of the NordForsk and the Nordic Innovation Centre.

In the Resolution of the 30<sup>th</sup> Session of the Baltic Assembly, 2011, the Baltic Assembly called on the parliaments and governments of the Baltic States and the Baltic Council of Ministers to follow the experience of Nordic cooperation in the field of research and innovation by establishing a common Baltic platform which would facilitate cooperation in all fields of research and research-driven innovation where this adds value to the work being conducted in the Baltic States.

**Regional research cooperation is not an alternative to European or international cooperation; it is a complement to national initiatives.** The level of international co-authorship is influenced by the proximity between countries – either physical (geographical) or immaterial, stemming from cultural affinity (historic, linguistic), or by socio-economic factors. It is good to widen cooperation also globally, but the most important is to collaborate among the Baltic countries. However the cooperation of the Baltic States is hindered due to the same structure of their economy, which make them competitors and complicates the development of a common Baltic market. Cooperation takes compromises, trust network building, diplomacy and consultations. Explicit political commitment is important in the starting phase. It is necessary then to consult all stakeholders, identify national priorities and base the joint initiatives on them. Joining forces, as clearly shown by the successful Nordic cooperation, helps to enhance scientific quality, reduce fragmentation, share labour, create critical mass within different scientific fields and in terms of investment, increase visibility, attractiveness and contribute to overall branding of the region, and to provide top funding to link national initiatives and create a stronger base for international cooperation.

**It is not necessary for the Baltic States to reach the same level in all spheres, but it is necessary to concentrate on what the Baltic States can do best.** Smart specialization strategies are vital that focus on a limited number of priorities that are based on strengths of each country, the potential of cooperation among the countries, and on the need for coherence between the priorities defined at different levels of governance. Criteria to identify the existing regional scientific excellence are, inter alia, the published research papers, filled patents, defended doctoral theses, existing networks of research infrastructure, possibilities to develop regional partner facilities. Applied physics, biochemistry are the fields where the Baltic States are strong. As regards patents, the biggest part of filled patents in Latvia is related to organic fine chemistry and pharmaceuticals. In Estonia it is medical technology and control, and in Lithuania – biotechnology and optics.

**Among the challenges that Baltic States face in the field of research and development, and innovation (RDI) there are:**

- understand RDI as a means to achieve economic and societal goals;
- define clear focus for RDI programmes, recognizing the needs of the society;

- ensure coherent and systemic RDI policy, i.e. thinking more about cooperation with partners;
- ensure availability of competent human capital;
- ensure good linkage between researchers and economy, universities and companies;
- lessen RDI dependency on EU structural funds, by attracting more money from the local business sector;
- monitor the progress of new strategies and measures.

**As one of the answers to these challenges, which can be overcome only by ensuring practical cooperation, stands the BIRTI project – Baltic Institute of Research, Technology and Innovation** – promoted by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia in cooperation with the biggest universities of the Baltic region. The priority fields of the BIRTI project are cluster of biopharmacy and organic chemistry (BioPharmAlliance), cluster of nanostructured materials and high energy radiation (NanoTechEnergy) and cluster of smart technologies in engineering and ICT (BaltSmartTech).

**In 2013** the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Baltic Assembly will focus on the Baltic research and innovation cooperation: BIRTI project.