

Interreg V-A Latvian-Lithuanian Cross-Border Cooperation Programme's 2014-2020

Project LLI-302 "Improvement of efficiency and availability of local public security services in cross border regions of Latvia and Lithuania"
("Safe borderlands")

Summary of visit to Poland for local public security services providers to other cross border region (T.1.3.1.)

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The experience exchange visit was organised as one of the activities of Latvia Lithuania's cross-border cooperation programme 2014-2020 project LLI-302 "Improving the efficiency and accessibility of local public security services in the border area of Latvia and Lithuania" ("Safe borderlands"). The purpose of the visit was receive an overview of examples of cross-border cooperation between Poland and Germany in ensuring public order and the security of the population and the benefits of such cooperation.

The project's lead partner – Zemgale Planning Region (ZPR) organized the visit to the Polish-German border city Szczecin (West Pomerania Voivodship Centre) for the project partners from Latvia (Aknīste municipality, Tērvete municipality, Vecumnieki municipality) and Lithuania (Biržai municipality, Rokiškis municipality), as well as the representatives of Latvian and Lithuanian Police, Fire and Rescue Service and volunteer firefighters.

The exchange of experience was possible thanks to the support of the Polish-German administration of the Euroregion Pomerania. The visit was organised in sessions (Poland police work and Poland-Germany police cooperation, The State Fire Service of Poland, civil protection and cooperation on this issue

between Poland and Germany, rescue service in border area). The discussion took place at the end of each session.

Firstly, the members experience exchange visited the State Police Department of Western Pomerania. The Latvian and Lithuanian delegations were welcomed by representatives of the administration of Pomerania Euroregion and the police of Western Pomerania. The representative of the Euroregion's Pomerania administration briefly presented the history and the development of Polish German cross-border cooperation. As the speaker pointed out, cross-border cooperation with Germany started in the early 1990 s, following the collapse of the Soviet bloc. As Germany and Poland have total border of approximately 470 km, Poland signed bilateral agreements with Germany. The agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Poland was concluded in 1991 on good neighborly relations, friendship and cooperation, on both - political dialogue and interpersonal contacts between the two countries. Cooperation include promoting cooperation between regional, local and other institutions, proposing new initiatives and making recommendations to encourage cooperation, and disseminating information to the public.

Another priority is promoting closer cooperation in the border region. Three provinces (voivodeships) In Poland are situated along the western border with Germany (West Pomerania, Lubus and Lower Silesia). On the German side, there are three Länder (states) bordering Poland (Mecklenburg-Hither Pomerania, Brandenburg and Saxony) with the largest part of the border, some 60 % or 280 km, shared by the state of Brandenburg. To cooperate more closely at regional level Euroregions were established. The Euroregion Pomerania, was established in 1995 and is one of the four Euroregions of the German-Polish border. In addition to the signing of a transnational agreement, Poland signed bilateral agreements with the Ministry of Interior of Brandenburg, the Ministry of the Interior of The Free State of Saxony, and the Ministry of the Interior of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. As the presenter emphasized one

of the aims of cooperation is to mobilise European funds by developing and successfully implementing joint projects.



In order to promote regional development, one of the opportunities to raise funding is the 2014-2020 INTERREG V-A Germany/Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania/Brandenburg - Poland cooperation programme. As one positive example, the restoration of the police administrative building was mentioned. The restored police station is considered not only as an administrative building but is one of Szczecin city the most beautiful historic building, cultural and historical object. Restoration work was carried out by means of allocated funds from European Union (EU) funds. Within certain days the police building now is available for visitors. That allows tourists and local residents visit the building, the ornate Tradition Hall and the patio as a cultural and historical object.

Thereafter, police officials from Western Pomerania Voivodship presented the police work. Police representatives introduced the police structure, the regulatory framework, told about the main development directions, highlighted the positive experience to date in cooperation with German counterparts based on the Cooperation Agreement between the two countries. According to the police authorities, cooperation with Germany police is close and successful on both sides, the more important after Poland's accession to the Schengen area in 2007.

The police representative also stressed the importance of the joint projects co-financed by the EU. The speaker provided information about Szczecin police participation in several of them. Mainly, the joint projects are related to increasing security standards and preventing terrorism threats. Projects include such activities as trainings for police officers, improving the technical and material base for materials, purchase of specialised vehicle to improve the performance and cooperation in order to prevent crime. City Video Surveillance Center as well as Modern Forensic Laboratory were also fully equipped on the implementation of projects supported by the EU structural funds.

As the police spokesman pointed out, accession to the European Union (EU) and the Schengen area, not only revealed new opportunities, but also created new obligations to ensure public safety for Poland as the new Member State. The removal of internal border controls in the EU has increased the responsibility and the amount of police work. Main threats in the border regions between Poland and Germany are illegal migration, illicit tobacco trade, drug trafficking, and car theft. Although crime has declined, thefts of vehicles, agricultural machinery and bicycles remain high. This, in turn, has created political pressure towards improving police cooperation between Germany and Poland.

Cooperation between Poland and German security authorities occurs in various forms and is based on a variety of agreements. For example, Poland and Germany have signed bilateral agreements on cross-border police cooperation, such as information-sharing, cross-border police measures such as surveillance, controlled deliveries and hot pursuit, joint police

operations in particular joint patrol. At regional level, Polish-German police cooperation takes place between the border regions (voivodships and Länder). In the area of public order policing, joint patrols and joint traffic checkpoints on both sides of the border on land or on water is organised on regular basis. For instance, on Poland-Germany police cooperation in situation if a Polish driver is stopped in Germany at a routine traffic check and realises that he or she has left the driver's license at home. In Germany, driving without a license is a criminal offense which means the police officers making the stop have to start a criminal investigation into whether or not the individual has a valid driver's license. All the inconveniences for the driver can be avoided because the police officers are able to quickly obtain information from Poland on the driving privileges of a Polish citizen. The issue is then reduced to an administrative offence of not being able to show a valid driver's license.

Cooperation also contains rules on taking preventive action, for example by allowing officers to cross the border to prevent imminent danger to life or health or to conduct cross-border surveillance to prevent crimes. The agreement also provides mutual assistance on major events through the temporary assignment of each other's officers in their own operational units. In addition, German and Polish police officers cooperate directly at large events like football matches or the annual, an open air music festival that attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Polish border town.

Apart from cooperation at local level, police collaboration between Poland and Germany is also managed by a specific tool, the Polish-German centre for cooperation between border services, police forces and customs in Swiecko, a town on the border between Germany and Poland next to Slubice. The joint management centre in the Polish border town, where the border crossing point with Germany was located, was opened in 2007. The collaboration focuses on Polish - German police and customs cooperation, and collaborates on a daily basis on the following issues - exchange of information, support in the coordination of actions in urgent matters, control of road traffic, identity and

vehicle controls, control of people under arrest, and assistance in cross-border police forces' meetings. The Centre is situated on the Polish side of the border, at the end of the German highway A12 and gathers the following units: Bundespolizei (Federal Police), Landespolizei from Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen, Polish Police from Gorzów, Polish Border Guards and customs services from Poland and Germany. There are also representatives of three National Criminal Offices. The centre is operating 24/7. According to the police authorities, cooperation is close and successful on both sides. Police officers, especially those working in the border area, have a very important knowledge not only of the country, but also of EU and international and neighbouring Member States' legislation. At joint centre, the police and customs authorities of the partner countries perform together in mixed international teams under one roof. They share information and experience on matters related to the shared border area. This makes it easier to coordinate cross-border operations in the neighbouring country. For authorities language is no barrier, as the officers working at the joint centres can speak the language of both partner countries. It makes it possible to quickly obtain information from the other side of the border without waiting for translating a request or having to involve a bi-lingual officer. Questions from police units of both countries are answered 24h/24 by e-mail or fax. In urgent cases, the answer is given in less than an hour. Since German and Polish police services began working together in the joint center and all the staff speak both German and Polish, the cooperation has become more effective, especially when it comes to searches. Communication ways are short, there is direct information exchange and transfer.

As another important factor for the successful cooperation between Polish - German police officers, was mentioned maintaining informal contacts without attracting investment, such as joint trainings, exchange of experience. Informal relations play a crucial role in the day-to-day functioning of German-Polish police cooperation. The planning and implementation of the joint activities of the neighbouring police countries and the practical training of their police

officers are equally significant. For example, it is interesting that patrolling together while the crew is on Polish territory there is a Polish policeman at the helm of the patrol car, but when the vehicle enters German territory, the drivers are changing and there is a German at the helm of the patrol car.

This mutual trust and relationship building is the key to cooperation success, and both sides are very focused on making this mutual trust possible. The team building activities and meetings outside work are a very regular activity that both Polish and German police forces are pursuing, with the aim to build sustainable and strong relationships both at work and outside work.

But there are some challenges in cross border cooperation, too. The language barrier was mentioned as one of them. While bilingualism is observed in the higher cooperation units, many police officers working on the field are not always fluent in both languages, which leads to some difficulties during mixed patrols. Often German police officers do not speak Polish and vice versa. This leads to a low quality of communication between police forces. Moreover, many administrative documents need to be translated, often by external translators, which leads to additional financial and time-related costs. To broaden the language skills and cross-cultural competence of police officers, common project was worked out.

Another challenge for German-Polish police cooperation, apart from the language barrier are institutional differences. Poland has a centralised system of government with one national police force. Germany, on the contrary, has a federal system with 16 states (Länder) that each have their separate and autonomous police force. Even though both countries respond to EU law, each country keeps its own particular rules to implement and apply legislation and procedures in criminal matters on their own territory. This makes the synchronisation of police operations and investigations challenging. At the end of the meeting the discussion took place and participants clarified the issues that they were interested in.

As next, the partners of exchange of experience visited borderline city Grifino (Gryfino), which is situated 2 km away from the Polish-German border. It is also the capital of Grifino County in West Pomeranian Voivodeship.

In Grifino, the members experience exchange had the opportunity to visit the local police station's new building. The delegation had the opportunity to examine the training room as well as look at the new shooting range and look at the BMW brand car purchased in one of the Poland - Germany EU projects, which is capable of developing both high speed and equipped with the latest generation of measuring devices.

During the meeting with representatives of the local government, the participants of the experience exchange gained little insight into the way civil protection is organised in Poland. As an example connected with civil protection, representative of Grifino municipality mentioned the Poland nationwide regional warning system in order to broadcast information on natural hazards through digital technology.

The system has been developed to warn people in crisis about storms, tornado, floods and other disasters, as well as to provide evacuation data such as maps, routes and instructional videos. The Government Centre for Security (RCB) monitors threats in a 24/7 system, cooperating with various national and foreign authorities, depending on the type of threat. After receiving information about the threat, the RCB sends it to mobile networks operators, who immediately forward it to their subscribers. Anyone who has a mobile phone switched on, if present within the "danger zone", will receive a short text message informing about the type of threat.

In the field of civil protection Poland also has bilateral agreements with Germany. As good experience and best practise establishing a German-Polish emergency preparedness system was mentioned. The German districts of Uckermark and Barnim and the Polish district of Gryfino had cooperated in common cross-border project to put emergency preparedness systems into place for their shared border region on the river Oder. The aim of this cross-border cooperation was to increase environmental security and to prevent and tackle natural accidents such as forest fires or oil spills in the river. The project

included training and simulation exercises. This was also a means to test the new equipment. The first a joint Polish-German rescue exercise took place in the middle of 2014 that simulated the discharging of several tons of fuel from a barge into the river Oder. Approximately 170 German and Polish firefighters took part in this rescue operation. The project helped to strengthen ecological safety through emergency preparedness in Poland Germany cross-border districts in the Oder river region. According to representative of Grifino municipality, the Polish-German joint project is an opportunity to increase the safety of the people living in areas situated along the River Oder. Expected results from successful realisation of the project - harmonized operational procedures for flood recovery efforts, practical application of new methods of hazard suppression in training and exercises, digital map with potential hazards in the 25 km wide border zone and available resources (personnel and equipment).

City Crisis Center, 112 Central and Emergency Call Reception Center also provided an insight into cooperation in this area between various providers of public security services.

In the follow-up visit, the delegation attended the State Fire and Rescue Service of Szczecin, got acquainted with the car park and the equipment of the rescuers and listened to the presentation of officials on the implementation of projects supported by the EU structural funds aimed at training, equipment and equipment modernization, improve performance and cooperation in dealing with the consequences of major fires, floods and environmental pollution, including assistance to the neighbouring German territory, if requested.

In their presentations officials emphasized that the State Fire Service, supervised by the Minister of Interior and Administration, is a leading rescue organization in Poland, based on a service of more than 30 000 professional firefighters. In Poland, there is no single authority dealing with disaster management. The national firefighting and rescue efforts are the main part of the crisis management system of the country. The Chief Commandant of the State Fire Service is the central body of the state administration is responsible for the organisation and management of those activities.

The State Fire Service of Poland provides with a variety of activities, starting from prevention and recognition of hazards, through education, research and development, up to responding to daily emergencies and disasters (fighting fires and other threats, providing chemical and ecological rescue, technical rescue, rope rescue, water and diving rescue, urban search & rescue, first medical aid). A distinctive feature of the Poland national rescue and firefighting system is its mass character and that results from including many units of the Volunteer Fire Service in this system. Polish volunteer firefighters are an important part of the national fire safety and fire-fighting system, which is based on voluntary principles and is positively evaluated in society. In Poland local inhabitants may create a Voluntary Fire Service under proper law. Such a volunteer fire service may receive financial help from the government for the equipment and staff training. In Poland, there is the principle that voluntary fire fighters' organisations conclude contracts governing key cooperation issues - type of action, response time and the amount of financial compensation. The Service provides with equipment and techniques, as well as training, the other financing provides with the assistance of local governments and sponsors. A training system for volunteer firefighters which includes basic courses, specialised courses (first medical assistance, height rescue, water rescue, etc.) and operational courses (fire crews) was established in 2006. The main aim of Polish volunteer firefighters is the performance of fire-fighting and rescue operations in those populated areas where State service units cannot arrive at the time specified by regulatory standards. Their functions, however, have evolved in recent years. The brigades have become more commonly involved in other types of rescue operations, including mainly technical or road incidents, where various rescue methods and measures are applied. Quite often volunteer firefighters are the first to appear at the site of an accident and take measures to save people's life, health, and property.

As well as cooperation between the police Poland and Germany security providers collaboration also takes place in different ways and is based on a variety of agreements. Due to geographical distance it is sometimes necessary for rescue teams to intervene on the other side of the border in order

to save a life. There has been countless situations when a Poland rescue team happened to be closer to the place of an accident on the German side of the border, and other way around. In order to make cooperation as effective as possible, different solutions are sought. For example, in the vehicles used in areas next to the border, Poland has arranged special equipment, e.g. computer programmes, in Poland as well as in Germany. Furthermore, all the forms are drafted bilingually.

In the popular resort town Miedzydroje, where one of the emergency departments is located, the participants of the experience exchange visit briefly were introduced with rescue service cooperation with Germany within the project "Integrated transnational rescue service Pomerania / Brandenburg" (InGRiP). The representative of emergency service pointed out that the border region is characterized by its peripheral location on both sides of the border. Compared to areas that are surrounded by rescue service infrastructure of other counties, the length of time from the alerting of the emergency services to the final medical care of a potential emergency patient is often significantly longer due to longer arrival and departure times. The chances of a cure for acute patients with acute injuries or illnesses are correspondingly worse. Technical and personnel equipment of the rescue devices follow different legal regulations in Germany and Poland as well. In order to compensate the described disadvantages, enhanced cooperation was required and common project was worked out. As the speaker emphasized, the objectives of the project are the improvement of the safety of the population with regard to a timely supply of emergency patients on both sides of the border through a much closer and more intensive cooperation of the rescue services at local and regional level. The rescue services in the border area should be enabled to operate cross-border emergency rescue at a high quality level. Within the project time period several simulation exercises, seminars, special trainings, case studies, analysis as well as the German and Polish language courses for personnel to improve each other's language skills, as the language and communication are also an essential part of emergency care will be organized.

Conclusions:

- The differences in the legal structures of the two countries make policy-making more difficult. Due to the variations in national legislations, bilateral policy-making is considered challenging. Every state has its own rules and legislation which correspond to EU law.
- Successful collaboration among the partners is fundamental for the achievement of good results.
- Both - formal and informal contacts between security service providers in a cross-border region are equally important.
- The language barrier is a major obstacle to cross-border cooperation between German and Polish security providers.
- The key activities included in the Polish German cross-border security projects - the improvement the technical and material base, purchase of new equipment and vehicles, simulation exercises, seminars, specific training, case studies, analysis as well as German and Polish language courses for staff to improve one another's language skills.
- One particular tool that facilitates cross-border police cooperation between Poland and Germany is the centre for police cooperation in Świecko, which managed to set stable and efficient operations, and a fast and effective system of information exchange. The centre greatly facilitates day-to-day cooperation between German and Polish police officers and other security and order services in order to increase public safety and prevent potential crimes. The centre is considered as a successful model for practice in cross-border police cooperation.

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