

## **Central Baltic Tallinn Opening Event**

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### Welcome words

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

tere tulemast – tervetuloa – välkommen – laipni lūdzam

Thank you for the opportunity to say the welcome words at Tallinn opening event of Central Baltic programme. I am very happy to see so many participants in this event. It shows that we share similar concerns and we wish to take initiative to improve the overall development in the region.

The relations between Finland, Sweden, Latvia and Estonia are characterised by strong historic ties. Being neighbours since ancient times, common parts and intersections in our culture, traditions, values and language, have been evolved.

Our shared interest in co-operation is based on our geographic proximity, historic and cultural similarities, and our successfully developing trade and tourism. Direct contacts between the regions and the local governments play a significant role in economic co-operation and have become more and more extensive.

It is often easier to target similar problems together with one's neighbours, and a number of problems facing today Estonia can be solved in common action from both sides of the border with Finland (including Åland), Sweden and Latvia. Cross-border co-operation has an additional advantage of learning from the experience of one's partners, without having to try out non-workable solutions oneself.

I hope that Central-Baltic programme encourages many new interesting and useful projects. For example, Tallinn and Turku are European Capitals of Culture for the year 2011, which can be a good basis for common projects.

Nature and climate are our common resources and shared problems. As countries of the Baltic Sea region, the four countries also promote active co-operation in the area of environmental protection.

Experiences gathered from the INTERREG IIIA Southern Finland – Estonia programme are helping to pave the way for the Central-Baltic programme and provided many examples of the positive results of cooperation projects. Some of them have been rewarded with different prizes - e.g the project introducing the common geologic history and most pronounced nature monuments as a tourist destination sites was awarded with the 2<sup>nd</sup> prize on popularizing Estonian science. And the project that increased the readiness to combat oil pollution at shores of the Gulf of Finland was just financed when the North-West-Estonia oil spill in 2006 happened and the real need to combat oil pollution was needed.

Central Baltic programme, which is introduced at this opening event, will help to form new partnerships, to encourage cohesion, to speed up economic development and to stimulate growth across the whole area. I hope that this opportunity will be actively used in all countries participating in the programme. All it takes is a willingness to work together, and I am convinced, that our regions and organisations have this willingness to co-operate, and they will turn the given opportunities into real and tangible results.

Let me conclude here by wishing you all a fruitful opening event, new inspiring ideas, and busy co-operation in the future.

Thank you.