

Report

ESPON METRO | The role and future perspectives of Cohesion Policy in the planning of Metropolitan Areas and Cities

Challenges for the Future Development of the Riga Metropolitan Area

At the University of Latvia House of Nature, Riga, Jelgavas Street 1 and virtually on the Zoom platform, social media and other media platforms

January 19, 2022

On January 19, 2022, a seminar-discussion “**Challenges for the Future Development of the Riga Metropolitan Area**” was held, during which more than 400 participants were introduced to the results of the international ESPON study “METRO The role and future perspectives of Cohesion Policy in the planning of Metropolitan Areas and Cities” on the Impact of European Union Cohesion Policy on the growth, planning and competitiveness of the Riga Metropolitan Area. The event took place on the Zoom platform, with streaming being provided on Facebook and on the most important media platforms tvnet.lv, lsm.lv and riga.lv.

In the introduction part, Edvards Smiltēns, Deputy Chairman of the Riga City Council, Deputy Chairman of the Riga Planning Region Development Council, Co-Chairman of the Riga-Pierīga Municipalities Association Riga Metropolis, emphasized the relevance of the international project results in developing the Riga Metropolitan Area and strengthening its role nationally and internationally.

The first part of the event was dedicated to the results of the study, presented by both local and foreign experts. Piera Petrucci, ESPON EGTC, Senior Project Expert, described the activities of the ESPON program and the ESPON METRO project in the field of EU Cohesion Territorial Policy. Giancarlo Cotella, ESPON METRO Leading Researcher, Associate Professor at the Polytechnic University of Turin, provided an overview of the Metropolitan Areas involved in the METRO project, along with overall findings of the project and the need to strengthen the role of Metropolitan Areas at the EU level. Research team leader of the project in Latvia Zaiga Krišjāne, Professor at the University of Latvia, characterised the Riga Metropolitan Area in the context of territorial, institutional and EU Cohesion Policy, as well as presented the project recommendations. The latter emphasized the following:

- the need for a more active involvement of metropolitan representatives in the planning and programming process of the Operational Program in the early stages of development;



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- promoting the discussion of planning regions as cooperation platforms on cooperation between local governments and the national level in the management of EU Cohesion Policy;
- the need for specific financing instruments to solve common problems related to the development of the Riga Metropolitan Area in order to improve competitiveness;
- further development of cooperation and management of the Metropolitan Area in order to achieve the goals mentioned in the planning documents;
- promotion of dialogue on the development of the Riga Metropolitan Area as an area of national interest and awareness of the importance of promoting cooperation at the national level;
- the importance of national-level support in strengthening governance mechanisms for the successful operation of the Metropolitan Area.

Evaluating the ESPON METRO project, Guntars Ruskuls, Head of the Strategic management board of the City Development Department of the Riga City Council and Rūdolfs Cimdiņš, Head of the Riga Planning Region Spatial Planning Division, indicated that its results are important and will be useful for planning of future strategic development of Riga City and Riga Planning Region, as well as for the planning of further strategic development of the Riga Metropolitan Area.

The second part of the event consisted of a panel discussion on the challenges of the development of the Riga Metropolitan Area. Participants of the discussion were Artūrs Toms Plešs, Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Tālis Linkaits, Minister of Transport, Ilze Indriksone, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Economics, Ints Dālderis, Budget Adviser to the Minister of Finance, Māris Sprindžuks, Ādaži County Council Chairman, Chairman of the Regional Development Council, Co-Chairman of the Riga Metropolis, and Edvards Smiltēns. The moderator of the discussion was journalist Ansis Bogustovs.

During the discussion, several issues were discussed regarding the development of the Riga Metropolitan Area as a space of national interest and issues of regional policy. Attention was paid to the management framework of the Riga Metropolitan Area, role of the Riga Planning Region as a platform for cooperation. The EU Cohesion Policy planning and financing instruments, their use to promote the competitiveness of the Riga Metropolitan Area and the quality of the living environment, and the development of economic potential were also discussed. An important role in the development is also intended for the activities planned within the framework of the Recovery and Resilience Facility for the improvement of the transport system in the Riga Metropolitan Area.

During the discussion, Edvards Smiltēns emphasized that the year 2022 will be marked as the year



of Riga Metropolitan Area, to promote the formation of a common identity for the Riga Metropolitan Area.