Dear colleagues!

I'm pleased to welcome you at the Annual Event of the Estonia-Latvia-Russia programme “Cross Border Cooperation. Advancing Partnership. Bridging Together”. During past year the Programme has entered “the real implementation stage” and this is the first Annual Event when we can show real interim results of the cooperation among partners from all three countries - local and regional public authorities, national institutions, educational, business support, culture, social organisations, associations, development agencies, non-profit non-governmental organisations etc. We are pleased that our project partners have been so willing to share their achievements and experience and we will have great opportunity not only to hear about them during today’s presentations but also see them during project site visit.

Up till now 30 projects have been approved within the Estonia-Latvia-Russia programme, five of them large-scale infrastructure projects. Most of the projects have vigorously started implementation and already at this stage we acknowledge that cooperation within Estonia-Latvia-Russia Programme plays a significant role in stimulating cross border co-operation and though being challenging, is successful and contributes to mutual benefits of all parties.

First of all, of course, this is the cooperation programme. But also it has proved the importance for the regions as the source of funding for the investment projects. We have followed the proportionality principle when selecting ideas that would equally contribute to all concerned parties. When approving Projects within the Programme, the main focus was on clear objectives and regional strategic focus, direct impact to border regions, building of continuous partnership, involvement of regional and local key players and development of innovations and regional added value.

Thus we believe that approved projects will achieve not only short term results but in long term perspective will facilitate growth of competitiveness and sustainable development of the whole region of the Programme.

The financing for the projects within Estonia-Latvia-Russia Programme is almost committed, but we believe that common efforts of Estonian, Latvian and Russian partners in developing partnerships and project ideas have to and will continue with the next set of financial programmes implemented under European Neighbourhood Instrument which will continue its main mission to help regions to overcome the challenges of their beneficial but still defiant location on external borders and address shared cross-border problems.

Have an exciting and fruitful day with Estonia-Latvia-Russia programme!