

## European network offers big support to small business

(11/15/12 Town hall Bremen) **International conference in the historical Bremen town hall shows new perspectives on how small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in the Baltic and North Sea regions can be supported in their efforts to expand their businesses across borders. More than twenty partners of the “European Business Support Network” (EBSN) met to commit themselves to keep the network and its services alive and running in the years to come.**

A project does not necessarily end just because the project documents say it does. The EBSN project is a perfect example of this. The network has been running since 2010, and even though it is supposed to come to an end this year, the partners got together on the 13 November 2012 in Bremen, Germany to sign a Memorandum of Understanding. This means that about 20 partners now have committed themselves to strive to keep the network alive and running in the years to come. One of the leading partners in the network is therefore optimistic about the future for the network.

*“A dedicated support to small and medium-sized business is important to overcome trade barriers and to find new export markets and business partners. We have seen a steadily increasing interest to join the EBSN, which proves that the companies are willing and interested to learn more about the network,”* says Caroline Privat.

The signing of the Memorandum took place in connection to an international conference organized by a partner of the EBSN, the Bremen Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour and Ports. Under the title “Small Business – Big Support” more than 80 guests participated in the conference that took place in the historical Bremen town hall. The conference focused on how SMEs in the Baltic and North Sea regions can be supported in their internationalisation efforts, and it was thus the perfect setting for signing the Memorandum. During the conference, Sven Schade (Policy Office, DG Enterprise and Industry) explained the EU Commission’s strategy for cluster policy in Europe and its structures to support the internationalization of SMEs.

Many regions have shown interest in the EBSN and have benefitted from its services. The EBSN has a large focus on training and has during the last year arranged around 20 training seminars throughout the Baltic Sea Region. The training included train-the-trainer for business organizations and SME seminars on internationalization – both of which received very positive feed-back from the participants. The EBSN has also given companies the possibility to meet face-to-face with potential business partners via matchmaking events and delegation visits for innovative companies. This way businesses from Lithuania, South Denmark, Northwest Germany, Northern Netherlands and Flanders have visited each other and shared information and experience.

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The “European Business Support Network” ([www.eubizz.net](http://www.eubizz.net)) offers support to SMEs on how to develop their international business. Services of the network include information on international market volumes and trends, matchmaking services to build up international partnerships, organization of transnational tendering partnerships, and access to Research and Development resources, as well as the development of transnational innovation projects. The services have been developed by the INTERREG-IVB projects BalticSupply and NorthSeaSupplyConnect which have been chaired over the past 3 years by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour and Ports of Bremen and the Northern Dutch Province of Groningen.

