**Implementation of the project "International Network of Business Incubators - IBI Net"
launched with seminar**

Riga Planning Region as the Lead partner has launched an implementation of the project "International Network of Business Incubators" or "IBI Net" coo-financed by Baltic Sea Region (BSR) Programme 2007-2013. The main aim of the project is to promote development of innovative and export oriented small and medium sized enterprises in the Baltic Sea region. The Kick-off seminar as the first of project public activity took place in Riga on 22nd of January, 2010.

The seminar was well attended by representatives of the project partners, ministry of Regional Development and Local Municipalities of Latvia, Joint Technical secretariat (JTS) of BSR Programme, Latvian Technology Centre and other institutions. The first part of the seminar was focused on general information connected with territorial development of the area covered by BSR Programme 2007.-2013. Welcoming speech of the seminar was addressed by L.Straujuma, the State Secretary of the ministry of Regional Development and Local Governments (Latvia) as well as the role of Riga Planning Region in regional development context was presented by E.Bartkevichs, the Chairman of Riga Planning Region Development Council (Latvia). Representative of JTS E.Kolosova gave an overview about approved projects of the 1st Priority of BSR Program 2007-2013 including "IBI Net" project.

The second part of the Kick-off seminar was dedicated to the topics included in the Project. Director of Latvian Technological Centre J.Stabulnieks (Latvia) informed about the role and importance of innovative business incubators (BI) in the economical development and PhD candidate of Economics J.Oshlejs (Latvia) outlined trends of economic growth in the BSR in addition to the previous presentation. However director of Teknikdalen Foundation S.Ericsson (Sweden) defined development opportunities and challenges of the business incubators in Programme area. All presentations mentioned above reflected economical situation and development's challenges of the Program area – background of the project – therefore Project Manager I.Brieze presented the main "IBI Net" objectives and activities which will be implemented as operations for support and positive influence to the development of BI as one of the main tools of facilitation of innovative enterprises' growth.

BIs have an important role in the development and support of innovative, export-oriented small and medium-sized enterprises (SME). It means the quality of BIs' services must be in accordance with the real needs and challenges of SMEs' during development. Therefore high level attention must be focused on improvement of BIs' management processes as well as specialists' knowledge and skills on most effective support methods and tools for now-established enterprises. Mutual cooperation among BIs and location of them in the international business environment would enable to offer high quality services to the existing and prospective businesses.

The creation of trans-national network of business incubators is main aim, why the project "IBI Net" is initiated. BSR business incubators' network will be established and strengthened as a constant platform for exchange of information, knowledge and experiences with the aim to promote establishment of innovative and export – oriented businesses in the BSR. The project associates BIs and technological centers located in Latvia, Poland, Belorussia, Sweden, Germany and Norway. Implementers of the "IBI Net" forecasts: BI from other Baltic Sea countries as such as Lithuania, Estonia, Denmark and Finland will be involved in the IBI Net network till the conclusion of the implementation as well.

The project will be realized on the several directions, starting with the research on the best practices of business incubation services and the ending with the development of the network

across the BSR countries. One of directions – support activities for BIs: investigations will be provided for clarifying which services are currently available in the BSR's BIs and what kind of support is requested by the new enterprises for successful development of them. The results of researches will be used for elaboration of suitable and common package of services necessary for enterprises as well as for development of recommendations on networking and further growth of BIs including suggestions regarding financing mechanisms of BI and other preconditions for sustainable operation of them.

Other direction will be focused on SMEs: IBI Net website will be created as the electronic information base for development of innovative and export - oriented new businesses, adoption of the new markets and expanding of the business across the BSR. Contact exchange for entrepreneurs and BI also will be organized as direct support activity in the framework of the project.

Human resources is one of the main elements in the business support structure, therefore exchange of experience, trainings on using of information and communication technologies in the operation of BI and providing of services will be organized for specialists of business support institutions.

The Project will be implemented by the Lead Partner Riga Planning Region (Latvia) as well Partners representing six BSR countries: Riga Technical University (Latvia), Teknikdalen Foundation (Sweden), The City Commune of Elblag (Poland), Centre of Technology Western-Pomerania (Germany), Innovation Centre Hedmark (Norway) and State Enterprise "Scientific - Technological Park BNTU "Polytechnic" (Belorussia). One associated Partner representing Russia will participate in the realization of several activities – State Institution Leningrad Region Business Support Centre.

"IBI Net" is coo-financed by BSR Programme 2007-2013 and its total budget is 677 050 EUR.

Planed duration of the project is 30 months from December, 2009 till June 2012

Detailed information about project and process on implementation is available on the website **www.rpr.gov.lv** as well as project partners' own websites.