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Lithuania – Poland

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What we have and where we might (shall) go

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HOW IT IS SEEN FROM GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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WHAT WE HAVE: REGIONAL CAPITAL VS. GEOPOLITICAL PERCEPTION

The Geopolitical Stigma ('Suwałki Gap')

- Framed as a strategic NATO bottleneck between Kaliningrad and Belarus.
- Negative international publicity deters private investment and cross-border tourism movement.
- Temporary border controls and heightened security measures disrupt local logistics and commuting.
- Foreign tourist arrivals remain below 2019 baseline levels; visitors treat the region as a 1-day transit corridor.

The Lived Reality & Local Assets

- Vibrant, active local communities striving to develop their homeland despite external pressures.
- Established cooperation traditions.
- High programme evaluation: Over 90% of local stakeholders view Interreg as vital for regional cohesion.
- Unexplored green assets: rich natural reserves, cultural heritage, and potential for 'coolcation' health tourism.

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European Context – EU Agenda

Commission plan for the Eastern border border regions

- Security and resilience
- Growth and regional prosperity
- Building on local strengths
- Connectivity
- Supporting people

The right to stay

People should be able to build build their future where they they live — not be forced to to leave.

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Security is necessary, but is not enough

Some investments can be for the future, some of them can be too late

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Resilience is a broad concept

Communities

social services, building of trust, volunteering

Business

supply chains, development of SMEs

Innovation

digital, technology, dual-use use solutions

Tourism

nature, heritage, a new image

Connecting them all: preparedness for emergencies

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WHERE WE SHALL GO: THE COMPREHENSIVE MULTI-ISO ARCHITECTURE

ISO 1: A better cooperation governance

- Beyond single bodies: helps integrate the whole system of public governance.
- Includes sectoral public institutions (health, education, environment, crisis response).
- Focuses on joint spatial planning, removing border obstacles, and joint service delivery.

ISO 2: A safer and more secure Europe

- Operational safety and emergency readiness across border services.
- Joint exercises for police, firefighters, and border guard bodies.
- Coordinated civil defense and crisis response protocols.
- Critical infrastructure protection (energy links, transport nodes, cyber/GPS defense).

ISO 3: More Resilient Eastern Border Regions

- Dedicated tool for regions bordering Russia & Belarus.
- Socio-economic vitality: sustainable tourism, local SMEs, and youth entrepreneurship.
- Rural well-being: mobile healthcare, social cohesion, and counter-disinformation.
- Ensures security is anchored in vibrant, self-sustaining local populations.

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From the Suwałki Gap to a resilient region

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Better prepared than ever

- Harvesting report from consultations with stakeholders and residents
- Study on directions and prospects of the tourism sector development in the Lithuanian-Polish border
- Border profile by ESPON
- IMPACT project – pilot on CLLD in border area
- EU agenda - the border regions is on top
- Experience in implementation security and readiness projects

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We cannot carry everything

A limited budget means concentration

Fewer priorities, real impact

Every priority must pass one test: does it make the region more resilient?

Lack of money inspires creativity

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What to do?

Identification of flagship projects for the direct award at the early stage and start implementation right after programme approval – security area top priority

Change of the management and control system to adopt new rules and to become catalysator for smooth investments

Avoid not clear and not ready projects for the implementation

Use of new potential mechanisms e.g. Community-Led Local Development

Wider involvement of programme regions which are located further from the border area

Selecting priorities and measures complimentary to national ones but not duplicating them (avoiding to be “second choise” programme)

Some investments can be for the future, some of them can be too late

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Questions?

From gap to resilient (and prosperous) region