

Newsletter

Dear reader,

The project partners of North Sea Supply Connect wish you all the best for 2012. For North Sea Supply Connect and its twin project Baltic Supply, 2012 will be a special year in which we will finalise all our efforts in achieving a regional platform for innovative business development: www.eubizz.net. We are preparing the launch for early this year!

Please read on as we explain the benefits of the platform in this newsletter. You will also read about very hands on results we have achieved: matches between companies, procurement workshops and recommendations for policy makers.

I certainly hope to welcome you all in Edinburgh, March 20 and 21, to our conference on sustainable energy, and the launch of eubizz.net and a buzzing brokerage event!



Caroline Couperus
Lead partner North Sea Supply Connect

North Sea
Supply Connect

Transnational SME Supply Clusters along the North East Corridor

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North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply European Business Support Network due to be launched!

The Business Development Platform that the twin-projects North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply have been working on over the past year has taken shape in the soon to be launched European Business Support Network. The Network will provide on- and offline services to support European SMEs in their search for new international markets, partners and suppliers. At this moment, project partners are very busy defining their service concepts that will be offered by the network to businesses in their respective regions. The online Network, called Eubizz.net is expected to go live by mid-february.

The Eubizz.net will be hosted by one of the Baltic Supply partners, the Hanse-Parlament from Hamburg, Germany. It is a very apt choice as the Hanse-Parlament, - being from Hamburg, - is geographically represented in both the Baltic and the North Sea Region. They will continue to host the website after the run-time of the project in 2013.

The services such as joint events, matchmaking, self assessment and trainings as well as information on tendering procedures have been further developed over the last months – jointly by Baltic Supply and North Sea Supply Connect partners. The best practice is already evident: Latvian companies found business partners in Germany, a Dutch knowledge institute was linked to a UK company and a Danish company found new suppliers in Latvia. It shows that personal contacts are what really matters!

This is why we invite you - all organisations offering business support in your regions - to join our European Business Support Network and gain the benefits for your companies!

Watch our new promotional film here and come and meet us at one of the events listed in this newsletter or contact us directly.

Go to: www.eubizz.net



North Sea Supply Connect

Sustainable Energy topic of Edinburgh Conference & Brokerage Event

Edinburgh, SCOTLAND - In close cooperation with Scottish Enterprise and the project partners Edinburgh Napier University and Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, North Sea Supply Connect will be organizing a conference about sustainable energy on March 20th and 21st of this year. The conference 'Sustainable Energy: Challenges and Opportunities for the Supply Chain', is targeted at businesses and organizations interested in the sustainable energy supply chain. The aim of the conference is to help businesses to improve their innovative capacity and to increase market access.

The conference will offer seminars by renowned academic and business experts in the field of renewable energy. Keynote speakers will be Professor Catrinus Jepma, Scientific Director of the National Research Program Energy Delta Gas Research and Professor of Energy and Sustainability at the University of Groningen, and Professor Ole B. Sørensen, Chair of the Innovation and Education Group of the North Sea Commission. Furthermore, the services of the European Business Support Network will be launched and presented. The event is hosted by Councillor Tom Buchanan from Edinburgh City Council. On the

second day of the conference, a brokerage event is scheduled for businesses interested in new contacts in the energy field and targeted networking. This event will be hosted by Scottish Enterprise and the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce.

Participation is free of charge. Registration is open from January 16th, on www.northseasupplyconnect.eu/conference.



North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply

North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply connect in Gdansk!

Gdansk, POLAND - "New Ambitions for the Baltic Sea Region" was the title of the 2nd Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region which was combined with the **13th Baltic Development Forum Summit** held on October 24th-26th 2011 in Gdansk, Poland. The twin projects Baltic Supply and North Sea Supply Connect took the opportunity to present themselves at the Networking and Project Village.

Baltic Supply The Networking Village was the ideal opportunity to promote the projects Baltic Supply and it was a huge success. It was buzzing with ambitious project partners and there was hardly enough time to speak with all of them.



North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply

Joint cooperation functions as a catalyst for other EU projects

The flagship cooperation between Baltic Supply and North Sea Supply Connect is not only a unique approach to EU projects - it also fits into the EU's overall visions of economical convergence of the member regions.

Both Baltic Supply and North Sea Supply Connect have chosen to focus on a three cluster approach: maritime, energy and food. And this approach corresponds to the EU's Cluster Initiative and the Union's multisectoral vision. Yet, the two projects do not only confine themselves to three clusters. They want to overcome the barriers for small and medium sized enterprises when expanding to new markets. Baltic Supply and North Sea Supply Connect have jointly developed the non-sectoral but service-focused European Business Support Network. The network provides a set of offline and online services which endows the two projects with a more comprehensive scope. The services are under focus regardless which industries they have to deal with. This will without doubt create better business opportunities for

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in Baltic Sea Region and the North Sea Region.

The two projects successfully add value to a number of the **Territorial Agenda 2020** priorities:

- territorial integration in cross-border and transnational regions,
- ensuring global competitiveness of the regions based on strong local economies,
- improving territorial connectivity for individuals, communities and enterprises.

Furthermore the two projects contribute to the Innovation Union flagship initiative envisaged by the EU 2020 Strategy. Baltic Supply and North Sea Supply Connect show other EU projects how to take the overall EU strategy and use it in practice. That is why the cooperation between the two projects is being used as a catalyst for other EU projects.

North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply

“Let's get in contact!” launch of effective actions

Groningen, THE NETHERLANDS - On the 7th and 8th of November, 2011 partners from both North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply joined forces during the first 'Let's Get In Contact!'-event. The purpose of this event was to set up an international network of Business Development Organizations. Members of this network will help each other in the search of international business partners for the companies from their regions. Business Development Organizations and Regional Development Agencies from both projects participated. In this way, the regions of West Flanders (Belgium), Groningen (NL), Bremen (Germany), Goteborg and Arvika (Sweden) as well as Tallinn (Estonia) were represented.

Initiators of this network are the Chamber of Commerce for the Northern Netherlands (KvK) and the Bremen Economic Development Corp. (WFB).

First beginnings

The event was motivated by the desire that the project partners shared to put words into action. Ways to support local businesses with their internationalization had been discussed at length within the projects and partners felt the need to launch the network with concrete actions. On the assumption

that BDOs can act on behalf of local companies when looking for new business opportunities, the aim of this network is to create a platform to find the international business partners that local entrepreneurs are looking for.

Results

As a first step, in a very hands-on way, a common understanding about the function and limits of such a business support network as well as some basic rules were established during this event. The next step was to get to know each other better and understand how each of the partners operates in their own regions. Finally, an attempt was made to jointly identify potential business partners for 15 companies that the BDOs represented at this occasion. The network is open for other project partners and for external organisations in the near future.

Last but not least, the next meeting of the network will take place on 17th and 18th of January in Tallinn, Estonia. The aim of this meeting will be the evaluation of the process and to find how to optimise it as well as a second round of presentations of companies and brokerage.

Joint forces for SMEs in West-Flanders and beyond

Bruges, BELGIUM - Syntra West, provider of vocational training and guidance to SMEs, and the West-Flanders Development Agency (POM West-Flanders) join their forces to improve the competitive advantage of SMEs in the food industry of West-Flanders. Companies will be informed on good practices of internationalization, get the chance to rank themselves against top companies of the food industry as well as receive free guidance to improve their internationalization policy.

Providing answers to the needs

One of Syntra West's activities for the North Sea Supply Connect project, is to organize training courses regarding internationalization for SMEs. Currently, a wide range of competences are being defined and benchmarked by top ranked companies. This enables the further development of the already existing self-assessment tool for SMEs to measure their competences in international business. The content of the training courses, divided over 5 important topics, will provide an answer to the needs defined by the assessment.

Seminar international business development

Early 2012, a seminar will be organized in West-Flanders for regional companies in the food sector intending to expand their business across the national borders. The event will be hosted by the Flanders House of Food, welcoming some important and remarkable key note speakers who will report on their internationalization expertise in the food sector. In addition, SMEs starting to internationalize can take part in a competition for five sessions of free guidance in important aspects of international business development.

Best practices

At the next stage, the West-Flemish experiences will be shared within the other partner countries and NSSC regions. Through train-the-trainer sessions, roadshows or workshops, the approach will be unfolded by POM West-Flanders and Syntra West in order for partners to implement the concept in their own areas and regions. NSSC continues to join forces to boost business growth across borders!

North Sea Supply Connect

Council Helps With Procurement Training

Basildon, UK - Twenty-five companies from the Basildon Borough area recently received free procurement training through Basildon Council over the past year.

Two Beginner and two Intermediate Procurement Workshops covering public sector, private sector and international procurement, were delivered by Westminster Compliance. The workshops were funded by the Interreg IVB North Sea Supply Programme and were arranged by the Council's Economic Development and Procurement Teams.

Stephanie Fields, Procurement Officer for Basildon Council, said: "One of our key objectives is to help local companies understand the procurement process, so they are better prepared to compete for opportunities. The workshops were successful in helping businesses know where to find tender opportunities, required documentation, and how to put their best foot forward."

Michael Broderick, Economic Regeneration Coordinator for Basildon Council, said: "We were very pleased with the workshops. Thirty-six people, representing a range of sectors such as construction, security, recruitment firms, and solicitors participated, and we hope to be able to offer similar workshops in the future to assist local businesses."

Anton Angione, Business Development Manager for Woodlands PH Ltd., said: "The intermediate workshop helped me understand the procurement strategy in the public and private sectors better and provided me with helpful guidelines. It was perfect, extremely well organised, and the best I have attended."

Companies that would like information about procuring with Basildon Council or that would like to express interest in attending any future workshops should email: procurement@basildon.gov.uk.

North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply

Political Advisory Group reflects on project targets in Gdansk

On October 25th Chairman Rob Engelsman from the Northern Netherlands welcomed representatives from six countries to the second joint Political Advisory Group (PAG) meeting between Baltic Supply and North Sea Supply Connect at Gdansk Polish Maritime Museum. The meeting was held on the occasion of the Baltic Sea Development Forum Summit. The PAG members were impressed by the new promotional film for the European Business Support Network. After an overview on the progress of the project by co-chair Barbara Schieferstein, Ministry of Economics of Bremen Germany, Professor Henri de Groot from the University of Amsterdam offered some critical remarks playing the “devil’s advocate”.

Information on procurement should be offered as public good

The causality that internationalization leads to more productivity or innovation cannot be proven. It is rather the other way around that SMEs need to reach a certain level of productivity to be able to act internationally. However, there is notably a positive impact of “economic diplomacy”: having well prepared missions and trade fairs enables companies to take steps towards a successful internationalisation. It is also important to provide reliable, accessible and transparent information on procurement and internationalization as a public good. Professor Henri de Groot emphasizes that it is not efficient to spend loads of money on dragging SMEs out on international markets but important to find ways to differentiate. Otherwise, SMEs that are not ready to expand are apt to fail soon.

Regional clusters are not responsible for companies’ success

Another study proved that regional clusters are not the reason for innovation or success of a company. Again it is the other way around: only already successful companies move to a cluster. But this does not necessarily increase their success. Individual factors are more important than the surrounding environment. These remarks stirred up a lot of questions from the PAG members concerning the focus on clusters. Andris Liepens, Ministry of Economics of Latvia, is concerned about the cluster development and whether not a more general business support should be offered. De Groot emphasises that a focus on certain branches and sectors is indeed good within a project. It is only the spatial clustering that did not proof to have any effect on the success of the companies.

PAG members to work on targeted policy recommendations based on project outcomes

Eva Kjer Hansen, Member of the Danish Parliament, proposes to focus on best practices and learn from each other. Yves Debaere, Province West Flanders Belgium, reports of difficulties that West Flanders faces with encouraging companies to go abroad or participate in matchmaking and brokerage events. Esa Kokonen, Baltic Institute of Finland, points out that the national government should be targeted as the next programming period is up for discussion. SMEs need to get a better access to funding programs and the program regions need to be defined more openly. The Lead partners will initiate a round for comments and remarks on the draft policy recommendations to elaborate the above mentioned issues.

The next PAG meeting will be organised on the occasion of the **European Maritime Day (EMD) on 21st-22nd May 2012 in Gothenburg.**



North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply

Challenge or Change: Digital market opportunities for SMEs

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) should know the challenges and changes of digital markets, represented by methods like electronic tendering in order to achieve competitiveness and access to international supply markets.

Electronic tender portals can comprise many different hurdles such as language barriers, lack of experience, diverse procedures and structures or legacy factors. Application forms or instructions are also often unclear and overly complex. Then again, electronic tender portals open a widely unrecognized door to approach new customers and markets especially for companies that have limited resources for sales and marketing activities.

Therefore, operators of e-tendering portals have recognized the need for improved usability and easier access for SMEs. Additionally, SMEs themselves accepted the strategic use of digital procurement opportunities.

These factors were reflected in the results of a survey conducted by the North Sea Supply Connect and Baltic Supply projects. The foremost purpose of the survey was to gather real life experience on typical SME obstacles for a successful tender participation from an original equipment manufacturer (OEM) perspective. At the same time, the feedback identified typical strengths and weaknesses of SMEs dealing with electronic tender services.

Personal Contacts as a Key Success Factor

The results made clear, that personal contacts and networking are of high value to SMEs for being successful in international supply markets, since invitations to electronic tenders are often based on previous personal contacts.

Marketable Products and Services

Interviewed experts explained that SMEs should provide offers that express their good price and performance ratio or superior service by the given material. Above all, the success of SMEs should be based on extensive market and product knowledge in order to identify the specific needs of the target companies.

Co-operations with Potential Business Partners

Global challenges bring about the need to exchange know-how and build. Therefore, the experts' advice to SMEs is: form strategic partnerships with potential business partners in order to achieve a long-term competitive advantage in the international supply market.

Strengthen Competences of SMEs

According to the survey, there are still many obstacles that discourage SMEs from responding to e-tenders. Therefore, SMEs should receive more individual support and training. The training should include general guidelines on procurement issues, strategies to prepare a convincing bid as well as technical training on e-tendering.

*Check our upcoming events on
<http://www.northseasupplyconnect.eu!>*

partners



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