

Potsdam, 08.03.2005

**Press release and invitation to a press conference at 11:00 hrs on
14th March 2005 at the Kulturhaus Küstrin-Kietz, Karl Marx Str. 36**

“LITTLE CARTHAGE” as starting point

CROSS-BORDER CONVERSION

On 14th and 15th March 2005 “CONVERNET - International Network for Conversion in the Baltic Region” will be explaining about site conversions in the Baltic region at Fort Gorgast and in Kostrzyn

- *The focus will be on cross-border development in the Kostrzyn – Küstrin region, and Fort Kostrzyn and its outer forts – including Fort Gorgast*

A good decade ago the Russian armed forces were withdrawn from the Eastern European and Baltic States. The military sites they left behind have proven to be an enormous challenge for governments and local communities. Despite the generally positive outcome – in Brandenburg alone, the most heavily affected region in Germany, well over 60,000 hectares of land formerly used for military purposes have been successfully developed for civilian re-use – conversion remains a task that will extend well into the 21st century. Due to the altered geopolitical situation and the consequent restructuring of national armed forces – a current topic in Finland, Sweden and not least in Germany – there will be more bases for which a civilian use must be developed.

Overcoming the challenges set by conversion requires a stronger, and international, network of actors. The CONVERNET network is supported with EU funding and co-financed by the partner members. The network is made up of 21 partners from Scandinavia, the Baltic States, Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic, with the State of Brandenburg as lead partner. Together the partners develop workable concepts for a variety of very different local and regional conversion tasks, and by networking it is possible to draw on each other's extensive experience and solution strategies.

Such experiences are gathered and analysed at partnership meetings and then flow into publications such as the “Handbook for Conversion in the Baltic Region” and the “Regional Action Plan for Conversion in the Baltic Region“. The fourth partner meeting will also be discussing these two publications, which will be available in 2005 and 2006.

This meeting will be taking place on March 14th and 15th 2005 at Fort Gorgast and in Kostrzyn. The venue is symbolic for the development perspectives offered by a united Europe. Conversion can be a starting point for much more; the old town of Kostrzyn was completely destroyed during the last days fighting of the Second

World War and is today a new-age little Carthage or as the Polish partners say: a new Pompeji. This core of the former German Küstrin Fortress has never been rebuilt. The main fortress is now directly situated on the frontier; the main fort and several outer forts are on the Polish side while Fort Gorgast and smaller units, situated on the Oder island, are in Germany.

Dealing with our joint history, and the opportunities opening up since Poland's accession to the EU form the basis for increased co-operation between both sides.

A joint working group was set up in 2003 to agree on the strategy for "Kostrzyn – Küstrin Foreshore 2010". The idea is to develop tourism as a joint cross-border factor. Concrete projects include rebuilding St. Mary's Church in the old town of Kostrzyn, setting up a joint town museum with two locations and maintaining the outer forts. The Fort Gorgast Association has been involved in the maintenance and development of the outer forts in Gorgast since 1999. As well as organising numerous events, such as the OBOA open-air music festival and exhibitions, the association is renovating the outer fort piece by piece.

We cordially invite to get to know the CONVERNET network at the Kulturhaus Küstrin – Kietz (Karl Marx Strasse 36) on **March 14th 2005** at **11:00 hrs** and meet the representatives of our lead partner, the Brandenburg State Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Lubuskie Marshall's Office, the Town of Kostrzyn and other project partners. Starting at **15:00 hrs** the same day there will be a **tour of the sites in Kostrzyn and the Oder island of Küstrin-Kietz**.

Media representatives are also cordially invited to join the tour.

Roland Vogt, Conversion Commissioner for the Brandenburg State Ministry of Economic Affairs, Lead Partner in the CONVERNET network.

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