



## **Jan-Philipp Wilckens: How to make enlargement work.**

“States are built up of governments, administration, bureaucracy, and military. Unions are built up of people” Therefore, it should be our main task to convince the people in the European Union of the advantages of the European Union.

The European Union is based on two pillars

- 1) The political and economic system
- 2) The social perception of the European Union by each European citizen

Especially the second pillar is and was underestimated. Even though we know that, at the end of the day, it is the people who decide on the political way forward, politicians aren't focussing sufficiently on social perceptions. This is why, according to the 2014 annual report of the European Commission, only 50% of the European citizens consider themselves *European* citizens. Most people associate negative things with the European Union, e.g. they think of it as a waste of money and a bureaucratic monster, or they fear that jobs will be lost due to low cost competition. Unfortunately, all of this has affected the European parliament election in May of 2014 where Eurosceptic parties gained an increasing number of votes.

Let us reflect on what has been done so far. There is only one programme that focuses on improving the social perception that Europe's citizens have of the European Union. This is the CBC (Cross Border Corporation) implemented by the EU Commission in 2004 to promote economic and social development in border areas. But similar to with other local programmes that focus on social cohesion, it is little known to people outside the border areas. Obviously, there is a need to pay more attention to the second pillar, especially during the next round of enlargement.

The EU has plenty of success stories. Why not promote those stories in well-established newspapers or European-wide advertisements to reach a larger number of citizens? Why not build social partnerships between established European member states (e.g. Poland, Austria and Germany) and potential new members? The established countries could become responsible for promoting the new member states. They could tell about those countries' success stories, their achievements and why it is in everybody's interest to have these countries in the European Union. Why not start a marketing campaign that focuses less on politics and economics and on the people, the history and the culture of new member states?

There are so many negative associations with the European Union that people have. For the sake of our future together, I believe it is very important to counter these by fostering positive associations and information in people's minds.