



BEN Seminar
“Northern Dimension: from policy paper to concrete actions – Role of Euroregions and other CBC structures in the implementation of the Northern Dimension policy”
(Lappeenranta, Finland, 25-26 January 2007)

Intervention on the Role of Regional Councils in the Implementation of the New ND Policy
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Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Our European continent has seen major and overwhelming political and economic changes since the early 1990's. The changes have forced us to rethink co-operation. We have been faced with questions such as how to best promote democracy and economic growth in the Baltic Sea region and how to work together to improve our environment. In this connection I think the co-operation in the Baltic Sea region – for instance in the framework of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) – has helped pave the way for increased regional integration and been instrumental in making the Baltic Sea region one of the most competitive areas in the world when it comes to economic growth.
- In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials of the CBSS, it is my great pleasure to address you today on a topic of great relevance to all of us living in the in the Baltic Sea region – namely the new Northern Dimension (ND) policy from 2007 onwards. Representing also the Swedish CBSS Presidency 2006-2007, it is natural that I focus in my intervention on the role of regional councils, primarily of course the CBSS in the future implementation of the new ND policy.
- Since you already have been provided with a general overview on the new ND policy, agreed between the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland on the 24th of November last year, and effective per 1.1 this year, I would like to emphasize, with the risk of being repetitious, just the most important change of the ND policy. I am of course referring to the fact that the new ND Policy is and its Policy Framework Document is a joint achievement of the ND Partners EU, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation. For the CBSS encompassing the EU Member States around the Baltic Sea, as well as Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation and in addition the European Commission and hereby providing an opportunity to have a dialogue with Russia about concrete everyday issues that concern our citizens, it is of utmost importance that the ND is “*henceforward a common project and a common responsibility*”¹ of the mentioned Partners.
- Let me very briefly look back. The 1st NDAP (2000-2003) foresaw that the CBSS, the Arctic Council (AC) and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) “*may assume a significant role in identifying common interests of the Northern Dimension region.*” In preparation for the 2nd NDAP (2004-2006), the “*richness of co-operation fora across the region*” was described as “*a positive feature of the area and this strength should be built upon, in particular through an effective division*



of labour and co-ordination among the existing organisations” mentioning once again the CBSS, the BEAC, the AC and the NCM.

- The CBSS has indeed tried to play a significant role in the development and implementation of the ND throughout the years. This can be seen and proven by highlighting some of the CBSS contributions:
 - *List of Priorities and Projects towards the Northern Dimension Action Plan 2000-2003* and the *Progress Report of NDAP 2000-2003* to reflect the CBSS contribution to the implementation of the 1st NDAP 2000-2003;
 - *Comments on the EU Commission Working Document* (EC proposal for the 2nd NDAP) with comments and suggestions from CBSS Member States, Structures and Working Bodies and related organisations;
 - Compilation of written contributions from CBSS Structures and Working Bodies, Special Participants and Strategic Partners to the “*Northern Dimension Information System*”;
 - *CBSS Survey on the Northern Dimension beyond 2006* encompassing the views and expectations of the CBSS Structures and Working Bodies, Special Participants and Strategic Partners on the ND beyond 2006 and handed over to the EC;

Dear Friends,

- The role of regional councils in the implementation of the ND from 2007 onwards should or could be seen as a two-way street. One direction is that the ND partners agreed in the Political Declaration on the Northern Dimension Policy from November last year upon “*supporting the existing multilateral co-operation within the framework of different regional councils*”² mentioning the AC, the BEAC, the CBSS and the NCM. The other direction implies that the Policy Framework Document calls these four regional councils “participants”, which “*with their different memberships, identify needs for development and cooperation in their respective areas and support project implementation in different ways.*”³

- The regional dimension cannot be underestimated for tackling many of the common problems we face. Take the terrible example of trafficking of human beings. The same features that unite the Baltic Sea region – the short distances between our countries, our common historical background, our cultural resemblance – are also the features used by the traffickers. Only they are still one step ahead of us. The same characteristic goes for many of our shared problems. How can we change this? The obvious answer would be to develop and improve the regional dimension.

- The ND Policy Framework document confirms the will of the Partners to see the ND policy enhancing “*regional cooperation, improving synergies of regional organizations in the North of Europe while avoiding possible duplication*”⁴. With the same objective, the Swedish CBSS Presidency invited the regional organisations/councils in Europe to an extended meeting in Malmö, in November last year. The objective was to identify areas of both mutual and common interest where concrete practical cooperation between the various bodies in Europe could and should be developed. The meeting carried out in a practical and result-oriented way turned up several corresponding interests for joint activities in the future. Shortly before Christmas, on 15 December



2006, the CBSS and the NCM met in Copenhagen to discuss i.a the joint implementation of the ND policy from 2007 onwards. The new Northern Dimension Policy provides possibilities, but also challenges which we need to discuss within the regional councils in Northern Europe (Arctic Council, Barents Euro-Arctic Council CBSS and Nordic Council of Ministers). Therefore, the Swedish CBSS Presidency has informally invited for March this year the other regional councils to discuss the possibilities and challenges and define how these regional councils can best work together for the benefit of the people around the Baltic Sea, in the ND area. I hope that this invitation is met with interest by the other regional councils.

- The Political Declaration on the Northern Dimension Policy and the Policy Framework Document, are of significant importance since they provide “*a common framework for the promotion of dialogue and concrete cooperation*”⁵. However it is of even greater importance to turn these policy papers into “*concrete and pragmatic activities with the objective to achieve tangible results*”⁶, a quote which by the way could be taken also from the Swedish CBSS Presidency priorities and which also reflects the changes the co-operation within the CBSS has undergone during the last years reaching a more concrete and diversified level.

- Today, the regional councils play an important role by promoting and conducting concrete, hands-on and result-oriented activities – which actually, once again, corresponds with the general objective of the Swedish CBSS Presidency 2006-2007: “*Cooperation to achieve common objectives, greater visibility and concrete results in collaboration with other regional councils, structures and organisations, and with countries in the vicinity of the Baltic Sea States*”. With regard to the latter, the CBSS very much welcomes the possibilities in the new ND Policy to encourage Belarus to participate in expert level cooperation in the Northern Dimension framework⁷ – as well as the cooperation with observer countries⁸. The CBSS closely cooperates itself with its seven Observer States (France, Italy, Netherlands, Slovakia, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States of America).

- One example of such collaboration of regional councils in the ND framework is the BSR INTERREG III B Neighbourhood Programme project Baltic Euroregional Network (BEN, www.benproject.org). The BEN-project is a concrete implementation of the ND cross-cutting theme of cross-border co-operation (CBC) fully in line with the Policy Framework Document which states that CBC produces “*added value at the sub-regional and transnational level. ... The Northern Dimension policy will encourage municipal and regional authorities on both sides of land and sea borders to engage in concrete co-operation projects of mutual benefit.*” The importance of CBC for the ND area is underlined by the CBC which, after being one of the five broad priority sectors in the 2nd NDAP, now has become a cross-cutting theme in the new Policy Framework Document.

- Since the BEN-project is but one, but a very successful example for implementation of the ND policy, let me also mention some other concrete projects and activities already in the process of implementation, or foreseen for the second half of the Swedish CBSS Presidency 2006-2007. I will do so by naming some examples for each of the priority sectors laid out in the Policy Framework Document:



- Economic Cooperation: The opportunities of the Baltic Sea region derive to a large extent from its economic potential where we have seen a strong economic performance for quite some time. One important issue is how to achieve a truly integrated market in the Baltic Sea region, including Russia. Russia presents probably the largest potential for trade and investment but it also has very cumbersome barriers to trade. Regional efforts such as the CBSS initiative to establish a High-Level Task Force on removing barriers to Trade and Investment need to be continued and intensified. The CBSS Business Advisory Council has drafted and developed this initiative that aims at making a valuable contribution to smoothening cross-border business operations in the region. It has a special meaning for the small medium-sized enterprises due to their inherent vulnerability. There is a large number of studies and surveys already pointing out the multiplicity of obstacles existing not only in the Baltic Sea region, but also within the whole EU, which the High-Level Task Force could possibly address for the benefit of all CBSS Member States and the whole ND area.
- Freedom, Security and Justice: In November last year, the CBSS established the CBSS Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings with the overall objective to counteract trafficking in human beings in the Baltic Sea region through preventive and protective activities. The CBSS Task Force activities will include i.a. actions according to established national action plans or state programmes to fight trafficking in human beings; victim identification and recognition; regular reports on trafficking from national rapporteurs or focal points; sustainable structures for assuring the safe return and reintegration of victims of trafficking; cooperation between the embassies in Baltic Sea region capitals and education of the diplomatic corps concerning victim-related issues. This Task Force will serve as an Expert Group to the NDPHS and will hopefully be used for implementation of projects in the NDPHS as it is already done by the CBSS Working Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk. New structures or duplicating expert groups should be of course avoided.
- External Security: International workshop on Decision-making and International Assistance in Emergencies organised by the Swedish Rescue Services Agency (30-31 January 2007, near Stockholm) which met an enormous interest from CBSS Member States and also other countries
- Research, Education and Culture: The EuroFaculty Kaliningrad project launched in 2000 aiming at supporting the faculties of Economics and Law of the Immanuel Kant State University of Russia in Kaliningrad in the field of curricula development and new teaching methods. The CBSS Committee of Senior Officials just lately decided to prolong the project until autumn 2007. The experiences and success of the EuroFaculty Kaliningrad and also the previous EuroFaculty project in the Baltic States (1993-2005) has encouraged the CBSS to seriously consider another EuroFaculty project in the Russian city of Pskov with Sweden as Lead Country.
- Environment, Nuclear Safety and Natural Resources: The Gotland Initiative Event in August 2006 in Visby to make visible, raise awareness and discuss jointly with politicians, media, experts and others concerned efforts to combat eutrophication of the Baltic Sea. Or, the CBSS Agreement on the Exchange of Radiation Monitoring Data (2001) extended by the Joint Declaration on the Exchange of Air Radiation Monitoring Data (2006) developed within the CBSS Working Group on Nuclear and Radiation Safety. The Gotland Initiative Event will have possibly a continuation on the Danish island of Bornholm in April this year which I hope to be a successful event to further highlight the problems of eutrophication in the Baltic Sea region.



- Social Welfare and Health Care: The CBSS is an active partner in the ND Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS). So are also 13 countries and seven international organisations, two of them regional councils (BEAC and NCM). Within this international initiative on enhanced health and social conditions in the ND area, concrete activities are carried out by four expert groups on 1) Social Inclusion, Healthy Lifestyles and Work Ability, 2) HIV/AIDS, 3) Primary Health Care and 4) Prison Health. The NDPHS Secretariat is actually co-located in the premises of the CBSS Secretariat in Stockholm which provides us of a very useful tool for interchange and cooperation between the CBSS and the NDPHS (Secretariats).

Ladies and gentlemen,

- The last example provides me with a good transition. A very successful tool for concrete ND actions is the so called partnership model. Two very successful, and also for the future promising, ND Partnerships are the already mentioned NDPHS and the ND Environmental Partnership (NDEP). The CBSS very much welcomes that the ND partners “*favour the model of Partnerships*”⁹ and are willing “*to continue and further develop cooperation within the framework of the two existing ND partnerships ... and to examine possibilities to apply the partnership model to other sectors.*”¹⁰

- To conclude, the new ND policy from 2007 onwards does not include the words “Action Plan” in its title anymore, and since the relevant documents for the new ND policy from now on are of a permanent nature I would like to emphasize the importance of a concrete, hands-on and result-oriented implementation of the new ND policy. The CBSS stands ready to contribute its share to turn the ND policy into concrete action for the benefit of our common ND area.

- We need to work towards achieving an even closer integration in the Baltic Sea region and promote economically and socially prosperous societies, based on a market economy, freedom and democracy. Societies that share the same objectives, whether they concern protecting our environment or fighting organized crime and trafficking in human beings, are the best guarantee for stability, security, peace and prosperity. It also gives our economies new dynamism and serves the objective of maintaining the Baltic Sea region as one of Europe’s strongest growth areas.

Thank you very much for your attention!



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- ¹ Policy Framework Document, point 4
 - ² 5th bullet point
 - ³ point 6 A
 - ⁴ Policy Framework Document, point 11
 - ⁵ Policy Framework Document, point 10
 - ⁶ Political Declaration on the Northern Dimension Policy, point 3
 - ⁷ point 8
 - ⁸ point 9
 - ⁹ Policy Framework Document, point 25
 - ¹⁰ Political Declaration on the Northern Dimension Policy, point 6