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Northern Dimension

Draft BSSSC Position Paper on "Northern Dimension from 2007"

Introduction

The current 2nd Northern Dimension Action Plan (NDAP) will expire by end of 2006. Since the first launch of "Northern Dimension" as a vision for the Northeast of Europe, this political guideline has turned into a viable and valuable tool to stabilise and develop this part of Europe. It has strengthened co-operation, integration and joint development in the area of ND. Both the ND Action Plans adopted since 2000 have served as a comprehensive frame for action of various actors in the area. The ND related Partnerships (NDEP, NDPHS) as well as the initiative Northern e-Dimension have generated important tools for implementation of their respective goals.

Since the adoption of 2nd NDAP the political framework conditions in the North of Europe have undergone serious changes:

- In May 2004 the **EU enlargement** in the area has been accomplished.
- In May 2005 EU and Russia agreed on "Road Maps" for implementing the **"Four Common Spaces"**¹ in the frame of Strategic EU-Russia partnership.

¹ *Common Economic Space; Common Space of Freedom, Security & Justice; Common Space of External Security; Common Space of Research and Education (incl. Cultural Aspects)*

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- From 2007 on the new **”European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument” (ENPI)** will come into force aiming at cross-border and transnational co-operation with countries neighbouring the EU. As regards Russia, agreement has been achieved that ENPI shall be implemented and programmed in the frame of the **”Road Maps”** for the **”Four Common Spaces”**.

Since early 2005 discussions are launched how to make best use of experiences of co-operation structures established by ND as regards regional implementation of the **”Four Common Spaces”** in the area. A Northern Dimension Ministerial meeting to adopt respective guidelines is announced to be held on 21 November 2005 at the premises of the current EU Presidency (UK).

Based on these guidelines agreement shall be sought among the ND partners - the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland – on a joint political declaration and a framework policy document, both of which to be adopted in the 2nd half of 2006 and to enter into force in 2007.

The BSSSC recommendations for a ”Northern Dimension from 2007”

Since the first Northern Dimension Action Plan has been put into practice the subnational authorities of the Baltic Sea Region have contributed to its implementation by providing initiatives and resources according to their own competencies, financial means and priorities.

The **”Guidelines for a new Northern Dimension Action Plan”**, adopted on October 21, 2002 in Luxembourg, especially point to the *”experience of actors at substate level such as the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation”*. They also suggest that *”regional and local authorities should build up knowledge and expertise in the use of the EU structural funds and programmes....”*. Furthermore, these guidelines refer to regional and cross-border co-operation as well as to twinning projects, which *”should contribute to developing adequate management capability at the regional and local level”*.

As regards the following recommendations the BSSSC refers to its **Position Paper ”regarding the Second Northern Dimension Action Plan”** issued in February 2003.

1. General remarks

- 1.1. The BSSSC welcomes the initiative to reshape the Northern Dimension concept into a political and operational framework for promoting the implementation of the EU-Russia Common Spaces. Nevertheless, the broader **geographical coverage** of the **ND area** –

comprising the whole of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) as well as Norway and Iceland – shall be maintained.

- 1.2. The BSSSC points to the fact that a multitude of **already existing co-operation fora and projects in the Baltic Sea Region** strongly contribute to the objectives and implementation of ND. This applies in particular to the activities of regional and local actors: Without their active commitment the implementation of the current NDAP could be realised only to a lesser extent. Hence the BSSSC calls upon the ND Ministerial meeting to build on regional and local expertise, capacities and engagement by reshaping the ND.
- 1.3. Although the main fields of "Four Common Spaces" as well as the objectives of the current 2nd NDAP need to be kept in the future political context of ND, the BSSSC demands that **more focussed priorities** shall be given to ND from 2007 in order to enhance visibility and effectiveness.
- 1.4. When setting up a new political frame of ND from 2007, BSSSC recommends to **avoid a duplication or multiplication of steering and monitoring bodies** where ever possible: Already by now the number of existing co-operation and steering bodies in the BSR require enhanced co-ordination efforts, whereas more lean co-operation structures could contribute to more effective co-operation in the area.
- 1.5. As regards further process of development and implementation of ND an active role and commitment of the **European Commission** should be maintained. The "2004 Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the Northern Dimension Action Plan" tabled in May 2005 ² is proving the importance of this active role by presenting numerous projects and activities of the Commission's services.

2. Major fields of a "ND from 2007" and actors at regional level

2.1. Economy, Business and Infrastructure:

Enhancing co-operation with neighbouring Russia requires also integration and involvement of Russian partners in pan-Baltic co-operation in these fields. This applies in particular to business as well as transport related co-operation.

Over the past years the sub-regional actors have seriously engaged in multilateral projects aimed at developing strategic transport routes in specific parts of the BSR. In addition sub-regional actors have

² SEC(2005) 688

entered into practical co-operation projects aimed at enhancing maritime safety (incl. preparedness and prevention) in the BSR.

In particular the **INTERREG III B BSR programme** has proven to be a major tool for intensifying project co-operation in these fields.³ Implementation of "ND from 2007" in these fields requires equal access for Russian partners to this programme – or at least the use of an ENPI programme fully interoperable with the future objective 3 transnational co-operation programme in the BSR.

The capacities of the Baltic Sea Region to serve as an efficient transport hub are of strategic importance for the whole of Europe. The BSSSC points to the need to develop a specific **BSR transport strategy** in the frame of "Transeuropean Networks". This strategy should encompass sea and land transport, harbours, harbour-hinterland connections as well as logistics and should integrate concepts such as "Motorways at Sea" and "Short Sea Shipping" as well. In order to enhance acceptance of sea transport as the most environmentally friendly transport system this strategy should address the needs of improving Maritime Safety also.

Against the background of a "**European Maritime Policy**" further to be elaborated in the months to come the BSSSC points to the respective potentials and needs existing in the BSR. In particular the importance of maritime issues for regional and local development in all the BSR countries is underlined. Hence, "ND from 2007" should enable open access and facilitate equal participation of Russian partners in co-operation in the frame of a "European Maritime Policy" in the BSR.

2.2. **Freedom, Security and Justice:**

Although competencies mainly lie with the national levels, objectives like e.g. good governance or development of civil society require respective efforts and work on regional and local level too. Any "ND from 2007" should also address the needs of **capacity building** at regional and local level in neighbouring Northwest Russia, including capacities for cross-border and cross-maritime co-operation with partners in other parts of the ND area (i.e. BSR).

³ *in order to avoid a lengthy position paper, no practical examples of projects run by regional and local actors in the frame of INTERREG III B BSR are mentioned in this paper. Instead reference is paid to the list "Overview on current INTERREG III B projects with active regional partners", compiled by the BSSSC ad-hoc Working Group Northern Dimension (status as of September 2005 – see annexe)*

Provided these fields be covered by "ND from 2007", the BSSSC recommends to pay attention to respective sub-regional co-operation.

2.3. **Research, Education and Culture:**

Regional and local actors as well as e.g. regionally oriented universities have developed strong co-operation projects in these fields. Most of these are carried out in the frame of the current INTERREG III B BSR programme.

Provided these fields be covered by "ND from 2007", the BSSSC recommends that respective co-operation work at regional and local level be facilitated.

This applies in particular to "**people-to-people**" contacts which regularly are implemented at regional and local level or in the frame of NGO work. Since implementation of this objective would depend to respective efforts at these levels, active facilitation by ND related programmes would be required.

2.4. **Environment, nuclear safety and natural resources:**

By active participation in related INTERREG projects regional and local authorities have proven their experience and commitment in the fields of environment and preservation of natural resources.

Future ND co-operation in these fields should encompass subregional co-operation at regional and local level also.

2.5. **Social welfare and health care:**

As already outlined by the "Declaration concerning the establishment of a Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Wellbeing" (NDPHS) subregional co-operation at regional and local level is indispensable as far as implementation is concerned.⁴

Against this background the BSSSC strictly recommends to fully integrate regional and local capacities in respective ND co-operation work. As far as respective funding will be foreseen broad and open

⁴ *"Relevant regional and local authorities within the Northern Dimension area should be encouraged to play a crucial role in the implementation of activities by Partners and Participants within the framework of the Partnership. Their direct involvement in all stages and at all levels of the co-operation procedures under the Partnership should be ensured."* (cf. "Declaration concerning the establishment of a Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Wellbeing", adopted by i.a. Ministers of Health and Social Affairs in Oslo on 27 October 2003)

access for regional and local actors should be provided.

3. ND, related instruments and pre-requisites

3.1. As regards the particular competencies and expertise at regional level the BSSSC recommends to give the status of a **cross-cutting issue to cross-border and transnational co-operation at sub-regional and local level**, similar to the cross-cutting issues mentioned in the current 2nd NDAP (Kaliningrad, Arctic).

3.2. Both the current ND Partnerships show that the **partnership model** as such is successful. Hence BSSSC welcomes that probably this model will be applied to other co-operation sectors, but recommends that any further ND partnerships requires full commitment from both sides of ND partners.

Furthermore ND strongly recommends that co-operation at regional and local level be incorporated in those ND partnerships which cover respective capacities and expertise at these levels too.

3.3. As regards geographic coverage of "ND from 2007" the BSSSC recommends still to give specific status to the **Kaliningrad region** due to its specific geographic situation and pre-conditions.

Nevertheless the whole of the **Northwest Russian regions** should be covered by "ND from 2007" instead of limiting this scope to those Russian regions immediately bordering the Baltic Sea.

This would require also to give sufficient resources in legal and financial terms as well as regards personal capacities to these allowing them to participate in co-operation projects in equal terms.

3.4. From 2007 on the "**European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument**" (ENPI) shall be used as a major tool for implementing EU-Russia partnership as well as "ND from 2007". Against this background the BSSSC recommends to implement ENPI with Russia in the full scope as suggested by the Draft ENPI regulation⁵, including cross-border co-operation as well as in the whole BSR being a "common sea basin".

In order to enable full participation of Russian partners in BSR co-operation projects, BSSSC recommends to adjust any ENPI common sea basin programme in the BSR to future objective 3 transnational co-operation programme in the BSR (currently: INTERREG III B BSR programme). As far as possible this should apply also to future steering structures and project application/decision procedures.

⁵ COM 2004/628 final (Article 8, 1 c)

- 3.5. Current as well as future ND projects can be co-financed by various sources, stretching from EU programmes to international, Nordic or national funds and others. In order to enhance **transparency** and to generate **additional creativity** of tentative project partners to develop projects according to ND objectives, the BSSSC recommends that the ND stakeholders list funds and programmes which co-financing of projects could be sought from. As regards EU funds and programmes the BSSSC recommends that future ND implementation reports given by the European Commission indicate which EU funds and programmes have been used for co-financing project work.

4. Final recommendations

- 4.1. The BSSSC reiterates its commitment to overall objectives of the Northern Dimension concept. Beyond all changes which this concept has undergone and will undergo the BSSSC points to the long-standing and experienced co-operation in the BSR as a far-reaching ground for implementation of ND. In particular this applies to subregional co-operation at regional and local level.
- 4.2. Against this background the BSSSC underlines the necessity to include the major co-operation actors at subnational levels in the future implementation of ND. This applies also to the regional authorities in all individual ND partner countries.
- 4.3. As regards the implementation of a "ND from 2007" and the need of coordination with already existing co-operation fora and projects in the BSR, the BSSSC calls upon the CBSS to become engaged with respect to its focal role of overall coordination point. This should include also an active and committed contribution of the BSR co-operation framework to the implementation of "ND from 2007" which needs to be prepared and elaborated in a co-ordinated manner.
- 4.4. In this regard the BSSSC points to the annual co-ordination meetings of the major BSR co-operation bodies as well as to the experiences won by the series of "BSSSC Northern Dimension seminars" held alongside the annual BSSSC Conferences 2002, 2003 and 2004.

Annexe:

"Overview on current INTERREG III B projects with active regional partners", compiled by the BSSSC ad-hoc Working Group Northern Dimension (status as of September 2005)