

## Meeting of the four Regional Sister Councils and of the Northern Dimension Partnerships,

Kirkenes, 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014

1.10.2014/AS

### MINUTES

The participants were welcomed by **the Chair (Mr Ari Sirén, IBS)**. An introduction round took place. The participants are listed at the end of the minutes.

The guest speaker, **Amb. Alexander Prishchepov**, Deputy Secretary of the Permanent International Secretariat of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization made a presentation on the BSEC (attached in electronic form).

#### Update of the activities and priorities of the Regional Councils and ND Partnerships

**Amb. Marja-Leena Vuorenpää (Finnish BEAC presidency)** reminded of the significance of thematic issues for seeking synergy and said that environment is a sector which has exceptionally many connections to other regional councils as well as to the ND. Transport and health are examples of sectors where it is important that BEAC and the ND work closely together. The purpose is to increase effectiveness of regional cooperation, not to add work load. The minimum is to know what the other regional actors do to avoid overlap. In some sectors it is possible to have joint activities. A Joint Meeting of Three Regional Working Groups on Culture (CBSS, BEAC and NDPC) held in May in Kotka, Finland, was a good example of common efforts aimed at synergy.

**The Chair** said that important issues discussed in the Barents cooperation have been inter alia the lack of East-West multimodal transport connections and particularly flight routes in the Barents region; a major project called the Action Plan of Climate Change adopted by the Barents Environment Ministers at their meeting in December 2013 in Inari. The increasing significance of the Northern Sea Route raises expectations of opportunities in terms of construction of supporting infrastructure along the route. The Barents economic cooperation needs reactivation. The continuous valuable work on the Barents Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS programmes deserves to be mentioned. The indigenous entrepreneurship project called Indigee aimed at indigenous youth has achieved very good results.

The IBS visited the Arctic Council Secretariat on 6 February 2014 in Tromsø. The discussion focused on mapping out issues of common substance to the BEAC WGE, its four subgroups and the respective AC working groups to facilitate contacts at expert level. A comparative table of AC and BEAC actions and plans for pollution prevention, climate change and nature protection was drawn up by the IBS and examined with a view to finding synergies and avoiding duplicate work.

The IBS visited the Permanent Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) in Stockholm on the 12 February 2014. The agenda comprised a general exchange of information on the current state and recent developments of both the CBSS and BEAC. It occurred that there are still several possible fields of cooperation and synergy potential between the two councils. After this visit the IBS drew up a comparative table of possible fields of cooperation and synergy potential between the two councils' working groups.

**Mr Jan Lundin (CBSS Permanent Secretariat)** noted that "Cooperation, Cooperation and Continuity" was the slogan of the Finnish Presidency. Three events of significance were the Clean Shipping

Seminar mid-January on board the Viking Grace LNG ferry, a Maritime Incident Rescue Project and the Turku Baltic Sea week, which for the first time managed to organize a major CBSS event – the Summit – back-to-back with the EU SBSR Annual Forum, the Baltic Development Forum as well as a sizeable non-EU presence with more than 100 Russian participants.

The cancellation of the Summit was, of course, a setback for the CBSS. Hopefully cooperation shall develop well on lower levels nevertheless. Line ministerials are planned for the coming period.

Furthermore, the Project Support Facility became operational during this period, and has until now committed roughly 2/3 of the 1 mn euro envisaged over three years for seed funding of regional cooperation projects in CBSS priority areas.

**Amb. Raul Mälik (CBSS CSO Chairman, Estonia)** said that the Estonian Presidency follows the Finnish one. The most important result of the Finnish Presidency for Estonia was the approval of the 2 new documents (a review of the CBSS long term priorities and on the implementation of the Vilnius Declaration – a Vision for the Baltic Sea Region by 2020) which very much will define the organisations endeavours during the Estonian presidency. We are now halfway to 2020 and the Declaration shows that the CBSS and many other regional cooperation structures are now doing a lot to reach the vision. Their cooperation and division of labour is more streamlined and efficient.

The Estonian presidency started in changed, unpredictable international political and economic conditions. The aim is that Council's work is efficient, impact-driven and result-based. Estonia is from 1-st of July 2014 also in a chairman's role in HELCOM and VASAB which opens good opportunities to contribute to cooperation between these formats. Another important cooperation format is the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, where Estonia coordinates the work of National Contact Point Network during the second half of 2014.

The sectorial overview: the first CBSS long-time priority is regional identity where cooperation with all various networks and initiatives is important parliamentary, regional and local authorities, NGOs, youth etc. The second long-term priority area is sustainable and prosperous region. Important work in energy field is conducted by BASREC, incl. energy efficiency among the themes. The third CBSS long-term priority is safe and secure region. It deals with such issues as alternative care and children's rights; the handling of cross-national child protection cases and child-friendly justice standards; trafficking in human beings; civil protection, incl. prevention of fire accidents.

**Ms Patti Bruns (AC Secretariat)** presented the priorities and current activities of the Arctic Council (AC). Work within the AC is currently guided by the Kiruna Declaration, adopted by AC Ministers in May 2013, and the priorities of the Canadian Chairmanship (2013-2015). Canada is placing focus on development for the people of the North and strengthening the Arctic Council. Specific areas of attention include: responsible Arctic resource development, safe Arctic shipping, and sustainable circumpolar communities. The next Ministerial meeting will be at the end of April 2015, at which time the United States will take over the Chairmanship of the AC. Working Groups and Task Forces are currently finalizing deliverables to be presented to Ministers. Cooperation with other regional organizations remains important for the AC, particularly greater expert-level coordination within cross-cutting sectors, for example, bio-diversity, adaptation to climate change and short lived climate forces (black carbon, methane). Further to this, exchanging information and sharing lessons learned are seen as valuable in an effort to reduce overlap and duplication.

**Mr Tómas Orri Ragnarsson (Iceland, NCM Chair)** said that Nordic Council of Ministers' total budget is over DKK 900 mn. The budget is divided across ten sectorial fields into different programmes and initiatives. During its presidency in 2014 Iceland will emphasize green growth and sustainability, strengthening the Bio-economic system and preserving and promoting Nordic culture. Denmark will take over the chairmanship in 2015 and has indicated that one of its priorities during the upcoming chairmanship will focus on the Arctic. Currently a new programme for the Arctic is being introduced for the upcoming years 2015-2017. The total budget for the new programme amounts to around DKK 10 mn per year. It is worth mentioning that it is open for applications from actors outside of the five Nordic nations in collaboration with partners from the Nordic nations.

Iceland and Norway are co-leading work within the Northern Dimension on increasing synergies and cooperation within the Euro-Arctic area. The primary aim and purpose of that work is to increase and promote more concrete and systemized cooperation between the ND partnerships and the Barents (BEAC) working groups. Next Northern Dimension foreign minister meeting will be held in Iceland in 2015.

**Mr Marko Mäntylä (EEAS)** thanked BEAC for extending the invitation to the ND partners and ND partnerships' secretariats. This practice should be continued. The EU participates actively in regional cooperation in the north in the context of ND, CBSS, BEAC and AC, and has good cooperation with NCM eg. related to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). Mäntylä updated on ND work following the ND ministerial in 2013 requesting a more systematic approach to cooperation in the Baltic Sea and European Arctic regions. ND SOM in April 2014 in Oslo took stock of this work in view of the next ministerial meeting foreseen for 2015. The programming of the new EU financing period 2014-20 is being finalized. **Mr Mäntylä** informed about the upcoming cross-border cooperation (CBC) programmes and transnational programmes such as the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) Programmes and encouraged the councils and ND structures to seek synergies with them.

**Mr Mäntylä** informed about the EU contribution to Arctic cooperation (see eg: <http://www.arcticinfo.eu/images/pdf/Compendium.pdf>) , work on developing further the EU Arctic policy (see: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/142554.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/142554.pdf)) and enhancing synergies between EU funding instruments for the Arctic, including a recently launched public consultation ([http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/maritimeaffairs\\_fisheries/consultations/arctic-eu-funding/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/maritimeaffairs_fisheries/consultations/arctic-eu-funding/index_en.htm)).

**Mr Igor Kapyrin (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation)** stressed the interest of the Russian Federation to promote cooperation in the Baltic region and in the Euro-Arctic and underlined the importance of such coordination meeting, having thanked the BEAC for inviting the ND Partners. Following the decisions of the ND Ministerial meeting held in 2013 there is a real trend towards the more systematic approach to the cooperation, namely within the NDPC and NRPTL. In the Euro-Arctic such initiatives as the Norwegian proposal to establish a resource centre in Tromsø to support the cooperation in the area goes in the same sense. At the level of the CBC the interest is to seek synergies with the Nordic councils, namely between the Kolarctic Program and the BEAC. All these issues will be discussed by the end of October during the meeting of the ND Steering Group in order to prepare the next ND Ministerial meeting in Iceland in 2015.

**Mr Marek Maciejowski (NDPHS)** described the focus areas of the NDPHS as reducing the spread of major communicable diseases and preventing lifestyle-related non-communicable diseases as well as improving people's standard of living and promoting socially rewarding lifestyles. Cross-cutting objective of NDPHS is the promotion of health equity and social cohesion, innovative approaches such as eHealth as well as the inclusion of vulnerable groups. HIV, tuberculosis, antimicrobial resistance, non-communicable diseases, social and health harms from substance abuse, primary care level and occupational health and safety are all important issues being dealt with by NDPHS.

**Ms Ilze Gailite Holmberg (NDPC)** said that NDPC continues the development of a comprehensive Legally Binding Agreement (LBA) defining the framework of NDPC International Secretariat (IS) and other aspects of collaboration.

NDPC works on a long-term strategy for the cultural and creative industries' contents of the NDPC collaboration. NDPC continues network, communication and CCI network development. The Partnership carries out two studies on CCI policy developments in NDPC area, on CCI networks in the ND area, on best working practices, as well as strategic and communication analysis. One of the studies is carried out in collaboration with the Northern Dimension Institute (NDI). NDPC has announced the 2<sup>nd</sup> Call for CCI projects. This project support will go to the most outstanding, previously NDPC-funded activities and networks in order to facilitate their growth and sustainability and to improve NDPC's visibility.

**Mr Oddgeir Danielsen (NDPTL)** stated that the Northern Dimension Partnership for Transportation and Logistics (NDPTL) will accelerate the implementation of major infrastructure projects providing assistance in project preparation stage thus stimulating investments within the Northern Dimension region. The partnership also serves as a regional forum for transport and logistics issues and complements and coordinates the work of cooperation structures already in existence. The overall goal of the NDPTL is to improve major transport connections and logistics in the Northern Dimension region in order to stimulate sustainable economic growth at the local, regional and global level by focusing on a limited number of priorities.

The partnership is to cover all transportation modes, incl. ports, airports, seaways, border-crossing points etc. In addition to the infrastructure-related projects non-infrastructure projects aimed at removing bottlenecks and optimizing both cargo and passenger transport are to be included. Projects located on the approved NDPTL networks will be given priority.

In December 2012 the NDPTL support fund was successfully established. The fund is to be used as grants to mainly studies bringing a project closer to implementation. This could typically be feasibility studies, technical studies, environmental impact assessments, financial analysis, economic analysis, incl. cost benefit etc. By August 2014 a total of 7 projects had received grants from the NDPTL support fund. NDPTL's geographical coverage opens for support also to projects located in the Baltic Sea Region, the Barents Region and North-West Russia.

**Mr Jaakko Henttonen (NDEP/EBRD)** said that NDEP is a structured financial facility for municipal investments with environmentally positive impacts. Partnership combines loan financing with NDEP grants and national funding. Contributions amount to € 180 mn for the environmental and € 170 mn

for nuclear window from the EU, Russia, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Belarus, Canada, France, Holland and Belgium. Participating international financing institutions include EBRD, NIB, NEFCO, EIB and KfW.

Remarkable achievements: wastewater treatment in St Petersburg has become nearly complete; several smaller improvements for wastewater treatment and district heating in the Baltic and Barents Sea regions. There is a clear future potential for reconstruction of heating systems to cut down emissions of black carbon in the Barents region. In the Baltic Sea region projects for further reconstruction of wastewater treatment plants are still urgently needed. Similar urgent upgrading of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk wastewater facilities constitute a concrete task. However, new project development in NW Russia is suspended by the IFIs due to recent political events. There is presently € 60 mn available for project co-financing. In Belarus the works will continue at selected municipalities.

### **Discussion on increasing synergies of regional cooperation**

**Ms Tuuli Ojala (Climate, Environment and Hot Spots Adviser at the IBS)** made a presentation “Synergies between BEAC and other Regional Organizations in Environmental Issues” (attached in electronic form) as a thematic contribution of the IBS.

In the ensuing discussion **Amb. Vuorenpää (Finnish BEAC presidency)** reminded of the significance of thematic issues for seeking synergy and said that environment protection lends itself well to cross-sectorial cooperation e.g. on health. **Ms Gailite Holmberg (NDPC)** emphasized the connection of culture and the environment as fields of cooperation.

**Mr Lundin (CBSS Secretariat)** welcomed the “sectorial” paper on possible cooperation between BEAC and other regional stakeholders in the area of environment/climate and praised it as a harbinger of other sectorial reports to the benefit of coherence between regional stakeholders. He stated that meetings on synergy are needed at working and vice-ministerial levels also in the future and underlined the importance of sectorial approach as a means of seeking synergy. He expressed the hope that the deputy ministers meeting planned for November by the Finnish BEAC Presidency might endorse such an approach. The definition of the North is a pending issue in the synergy context. **Amb. Mälik (Estonian CBSS presidency)** suggested taking on HELCOM as a participant in this forum because of its considerable role in the environment field.

**Mr Maciejowski (NDPHS)** said that sporadically one can hear a comment that the NDPHS should pay more attention to the northernmost parts of the Northern Dimension area. The NDPHS Secretariat’s view has always been that it is foremost for the countries concerned to bring their views and proposals to the NDPHS table and ensure those would be heard during the discussion of the Partnership’s priorities and areas of action. The ongoing development of the new NDPHS Strategy and Action Plan for the period up to 2020 offers an excellent opportunity to do so.

**Mr Mäntylä (EEAS)** supported a sectorial/thematic approach to enhancing coherence between the different actors in the region. Recent coherence meetings organized by NDPTL in the transport field and the joint culture meeting of NDPC/CBSS/BEAC are steps in the right direction. In this work financial cooperation programmes such as CBC, BSR and NPA should also be taken into account.

**Mr Kapyrin (Russia)** supported such a thematic approach in the coordination which should be based on common priorities of all the participants in different strategic documents of non-EU states and also the EU Baltic Sea Strategy. Such a synergy must come first of all from the willingness of the states participating in different formats of cooperation in the Baltic and in the North, which have a primary role. So if such coordination is effective within the participating states it will be also promoted at the level of organizations. The secretariats will find in this willingness additional inputs to seek more coordinated approaches.

**Mr Danielsen (NDPTL)** noted that coordination between various projects is essential. Projects that receive funding tend to produce often only reports and there are hardly any “bankable” ones that would lead to concrete business. National priorities should be heeded to take this better into account.

**The Chair** said that the seeking of synergy has to start from experts and their contacts with each other across the Regional Sister Councils and ND Partnerships. Unless the member states pay sufficient attention to keeping the issue afloat results cannot be expected.

**Next meeting** will be hosted by the AC Secretariat in Tromsø in 2015.

#### **List of participants**

**AC**, Ms Patti Bruns, Working Group Coordinator at the Arctic Council Secretariat

**CBSS**, Mr Jan Lundin, Director General of the Permanent Secretariat

**Estonia/CBSS Chair**, Mr Raul Mälk, Ambassador-at-large

**Finland/BEAC Chair**, Ms Marja-Leena Vuorenpää, Ambassador

**EEAS**, Mr Marko Mäntylä, Policy Officer, Northern Dimension and Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region

**Russian Federation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, Mr Igor Kapyrin, Deputy Director

**Iceland/ NCM Chair**, Mr Tómas Orri Ragnarsson, Counsellor, Arctic Affairs

**NDP on Culture**, Ms Ilze Gailite Holmberg, Senior Adviser

**NDP on Environment**, Mr Jaakko Henttonen, Director

**NDP on Transport and Logistics**, Mr Oddgeir Danielsen, Director

**NDP in Public Health and Social Well-being**, Mr Marek Maciejowski, Head of Secretariat

**Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization**, Mr Alexander Prishchepov, Ambassador

**IBS**, **Mr Ari Sirén**, Head of the International Barents Secretariat

**Mr Yury Nikiforov**, Executive Officer

**Mr Roy Hojem**, Secretary/Accountant

**Ms Tuuli Ojala**, Climate, Environment and Hot Spots Adviser

**Mr Tomas Hallberg**, Counsellor, (successor of Mr Sirén as of 16 January 2015)