

## **Conclusions by the Chair**

The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being held its eleventh Annual Conference (PAC) on 20 November 2015 in Berlin, Germany. Ms. Annette Widmann-Mauz, Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry of Health, hosted and chaired the Conference. Ministers responsible for health and social affairs and other high representatives of Partners took part in the event.

The PAC held a discussion on a wide spectrum of issues related to public health and social well-being in the Northern Dimension area, with the focus on the regional cooperation for better health and social well-being and the NDPHS contribution to it. Current and emerging regional challenges, and joint actions to address them, were discussed to that end – among them the main theme of the Conference: the growing challenge of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). A declaration how to tackle the challenges of AMR in the Northern Dimension area was adopted stating the Partners' firm commitment to fighting this increasingly worrying health problem.

### **Regional cooperation for better health and social well-being. NDPHS Strategy 2020 and its Action Plan**

The PAC agreed that – since the main social well-being and health related challenges faced by the Partner Countries are the same, and given the multitude and character of these challenges – profound regional cooperation and regional engagement are essential for both an effective response to these challenges as well as ensuring long-term stability and economic development of the countries and the region as a whole. The Partnership's role as a unique platform for concerted action in the health and social welfare sector through increased cooperation and enhanced coordination of international activities is widely recognised and valued, not least by having the NDPHS successfully continue as the Coordinator for the Policy Area "Health" in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) Action Plan.

The PAC noted the outcomes of the 4<sup>th</sup> Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum held on 10-11 May 2015 in Reykjavík, Iceland, and the 24<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference held on 30 August – 1 September 2015 in Rostock-Warnemünde, Germany. It highly appreciated the participating parliamentarians' keen attention paid to health and social welfare issues and their support for the NDPHS and the work carried out by it.

The Partnership – whose mission is to promote sustainable development of the Northern Dimension area by improving peoples' health and social well-being – will continue providing a useful platform for concerted action in regional efforts. To that end the PAC expressed its satisfaction with the new NDPHS Strategy 2020 and its Action Plan, which were developed by the NDPHS Strategy Working Group under the Finnish leadership and recently adopted

by the NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives (CSR) under the German Chairmanship. The Strategy and the Action Plan are milestones for the NDPHS and will guide the Partner Countries and Organisations in their joint efforts to achieve improvements in the priority areas agreed upon during the latest ministerial-level PAC, i.e.:

- Antimicrobial resistance;
- HIV/AIDS and associated infections;
- Non-communicable diseases;
- Alcohol and substance abuse;
- Occupational safety and health and well-being at work;
- Primary health care.

The PAC reiterated its wish that the new NDPHS Strategy 2020 and its Action Plan be used to also strengthen and improve the NDPHS structures and efforts. The latter two must aim to achieve the agreed tangible and time-bound results with measurable impact to help improve public health and social well-being in the Northern Dimension area. To that end, the PAC called on the Partner Countries and Partner Organisations to ensure that proper human and financial resources be provided to help achieve the above and realize the Partnership's Vision 2020 of making the Partnership a highly valued and innovative regional network that significantly contributes to the improvement of people's health and social well-being in the Northern Dimension area.

The PAC noted with appreciation that the CSR has recently reformed the former expert-level structures of the Partnership and established the following new groups to help ensure successful implementation of the planned activities:

- Expert Group on Antimicrobial Resistance (led by Sweden);
- Expert Group on Alcohol and Substance Abuse (led by Norway);
- Expert Group on HIV, TB and Associated Infections (led by Finland);
- Expert Group on Non-communicable Diseases (led by Russia);
- Expert Group on Occupational Safety and Health (led by Finland);
- Expert Group on Prison Health (led by Germany);
- Expert Group on Primary Health Care (led by Russia).

The PAC thanked the Partners for the support provided to the Partnership so far, not least Finland, Norway and Sweden for their leadership in the former expert-level structures, and the European Union for the project funds provided and welcomed the future support pledged by the aforementioned three countries, Russia and Germany to lead the NDPHS Expert Groups in the years to come.

Finally, the PAC noted that the implementation of the new Action Plan has already started, *inter alia*, through the projects led by the NDPHS Secretariat. To that end, it appreciated the successful regional events organised by the Secretariat during the 6<sup>th</sup> EUSBSR Annual Forum on 16 June 2015 in Jurmala, Latvia, and on the side-lines of the 24<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference on 30 August 2015 in Rostock, Germany. Both of them helped strengthen the recognition of health and social well-being on the political agenda in the region and ensure a broader stakeholder commitment to include the aspects of health and the quality of life in policy-making.

## **Health and economic development**

The PAC appreciated the outcome of the study on “The Importance of Health and Social Well-being for the Economy and Other Policy Areas.” The study report written by an expert from the Lund University, Sweden, for the NDPHS specifically addresses three main sets of issues: (i) the direct and indirect costs associated with ill health taking into account some key trends and processes, (ii) the impact of poor health and unfavourable social background on economic progress, and (iii) examples of health policies and their impact on the economy. To that end, it argues that, while economic prosperity is good for health, good health outcomes also favour economic growth and development. Importantly, the direct costs of illness are only part of the total costs and may not be the largest share. Consequently, the indirect costs are often very large and include the loss of resources due to mortality and morbidity.

The PAC reiterated that investment in health is not only about containing future health care and social welfare costs, but also an investment in economic growth. While recognising that the highest attainable standard of health is a human right, the PAC emphasised that policies to improve peoples’ health need to cut across many sectors and require population-wide interventions that are largely beyond the power of ministries of health to introduce. The PAC stressed that the best approach is Health in All Policies (HiAP), aiming to include health considerations in policy making across different sectors that influence health, such as transportation, agriculture, land use, housing, public safety, and education.

## **Agreement on the establishment of the NDPHS Secretariat**

The PAC welcomed the signature of the Agreement on the establishment of the NDPHS Secretariat by Poland and the completion of the national legal procedure necessary for the Agreement to enter into force for her. The PAC was looking forward to welcoming Poland as a Party to the Agreement in the nearest future.

The PAC encouraged Lithuania to promptly sign the Agreement and take the necessary steps for her to also become a Party to it.

The German chairmanship succeeded to ensure a stable financial basis for the Partnership in recent years. In this context the PAC reiterated the importance of ensuring financial stability of the NDPHS Secretariat and pleaded that all contributions to the Secretariat’s annual budget be paid consistent with the principle of co-financing and in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement.

## **Antimicrobial resistance – a growing regional and global threat requiring urgent concerted action**

The PAC discussed the outcome of a regional event "From strategies to action – Addressing the challenges of AMR in the Northern Dimension area" held by the NDPHS the day before the Partnership Annual Conference. The event participants discussed the background to the antimicrobial resistance (AMR) problems and possible preventive measures to contain it.

While commending the NDPHS AMR Expert Group for its excellent preparatory work on the event, the PAC shared the participants' view that the growing AMR in microorganisms is an increasing global health problem and a challenge to the societies, which can be successfully resolved through international collaboration. The NDPHS Strategy 2020 and its Action Plan tackle AMR as one of the NDPHS priorities and will contribute to and complement the European and global action plans on AMR.

While expressing its worry that there is a great variation in the availability and quality of surveillance data on AMR and antibiotic consumption and the data on the prevalence of AMR and usage of antibiotics in the region's populations, which, altogether, contribute to an incomplete understanding of the regional AMR situation – the PAC welcomed the on-going NDPHS project “Northern Dimension Antibiotic Resistance Study (NoDARS)” that aims to help address many of these gaps.

The PAC also stressed that, as a multi-sectorial problem, AMR requires concerted efforts of all those concerned including, but not limited to, actors from human and veterinary medicine, agriculture, the food industry and the environmental sector. Moreover, there is a need to increase the knowledge and understanding of the AMR problems both in the health care sector and in the public at large.

Having in mind the above and recognising that all Partner Countries need to take urgent action to help combat AMR, the PAC adopted the NDPHS Declaration “From strategies to action – how to tackle the challenges of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in the Northern Dimension area” expressing the Partners' firm commitment to fighting this increasingly worrying health problem by, *inter alia*:

- Providing political support and facilitating the exchange of relevant information and experience among experts and between policy and decision-makers;
- Working towards strengthening the coordination of activities between relevant sectors;
- Encouraging updating and implementation of a comprehensive strategy to fight AMR in line with the WHO Global action plan on antimicrobial resistance;
- Strengthening the one-health approach, tackling all areas alike (human and animal health, food and agriculture) and striving to preserve the use of antimicrobials only for the purpose of medical treatment after appropriate diagnostics;
- Encouraging wider participation of relevant national authorities in already existing and new internationally agreed surveillance systems for easier comparison and better understanding of the AMR problem;
- Supporting exchange of knowledge between experts in the Partner Countries to ease the development and implementation of key indicators for rational use of antibiotics and guidelines regarding rational use and infection prevention and control programmes;
- Facilitating efforts to increase the capacity of health care providers and supporting the efforts being made by representatives of the NDPHS in reaching out to the general public with information on AMR and its impact;
- Facilitating cohesive implementation of shared policy recommendations on AMR in the Partner countries;
- Supporting, through the NDPHS, the facilitation of cooperation through joint international activities that will be adapted to the prevailing situation in the countries of the Northern Dimension area.

## **Final provisions**

The PAC thanked Germany for successfully chairing the Partnership during its two-year term, as well as for the excellent hosting of the PAC event and its side-event: the Conference “From strategies to action – Addressing the challenges of AMR in the Northern Dimension area.”

The PAC expressed its appreciation to the NDPHS Secretariat for its excellent work and support to the Partnership during the German Chairmanship.

The PAC elected Estonia as the Partnership Chair and Latvia as the Co-Chair for the next two years.

The PAC decided to hold the Partnership Annual Conference at the senior representatives level in 2016 and the next ministerial-level Partnership Annual Conference in 2017.

\* \* \*