

## **Conclusions by the Chair**

The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being held its fourth Annual Conference (PAC) on 16 November 2007 in Vilnius, Lithuania. Mr. Rimvydas Turčinskas, Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania, hosted and chaired the Conference. Ministers of Health and/or Social Affairs and other high representatives of Partners and guests from countries not Partners to the Partnership, notably Portugal acting in its capacity as the current EU Presidency, 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 occupational safety and health with broad health content as the main theme of the conference. Further, it discussed the progress made by the Partnership as well as future direction of the Partnership and its development.

### **Northern Dimension Policy context**

The PAC noted the importance of the new Northern Dimension Policy that came into force on 1 January 2007 and which is based on the Framework Document and the Political Declaration approved at the Northern Dimension Summit in Helsinki, Finland, on 24 November 2006.

Further, the PAC acknowledged that the NDPHS has been playing and will continue to play an important role in the implementation of the new Northern Dimension Policy, in general, and one of its six priority sectors, namely “social welfare and health care, including prevention of communicable diseases and life-style related diseases and promotion of cooperation between health and social services,” in particular.

### **Progress of the Partnership**

The PAC reviewed the progress of the Partnership since the last ministerial PAC held in 2006, and approved the NDPHS Progress Report for 2007 submitted by the NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives.

The PAC noted with satisfaction that the Partnership rapidly advanced its activities to achieve its goals and objectives and that future plans to further enhance the impact of the NDPHS were already in place. In this regard the good work of the NDPHS Expert Groups and Associated Expert Groups, as well as the development of further elements of the Partnership Co-ordinating and Financing Mechanism were highlighted. This was possible not least thanks to the financial and other support provided by many countries and organisations, for which the PAC expressed its great appreciation.

The PAC welcomed the development of the NDPHS Database and the NDPHS Project Pipeline and approved them for immediate public launch. Together with the NDPHS Appropriations Account and the recently developed new NDPHS website, they will form important elements of the Partnership Co-ordinating and Financing Mechanism and improve the Partnership's possibilities to further enhance co-operation and co-ordination.

The PAC noted with appreciation a large variety of activities implemented and being implemented by the Partners. All those activities aimed at promoting and supporting the positive developments in public health and social well-being in the Northern Dimension area.

The PAC also welcomed the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC), which joined the Partnership in 2007 as the 22<sup>nd</sup> Partner.

Finally, the PAC expressed its appreciation to the NDPHS Secretariat for its excellent work and support in taking the Partnership activities forward.

### **Future direction of the Partnership and its development**

The PAC discussed future direction of the Partnership and its development, and concluded with satisfaction that the Partnership has been able to lay down a solid foundation for continued successful work in the future.

While underlining the importance of increased Partnership's efforts to meet the goals and objectives stipulated in the Oslo Declaration, the PAC adopted the NDPHS Work Plan for 2008.

The PAC also recalled that the Partners have a common responsibility for the Partnership and emphasised the importance of providing the Partnership with ample human and financial support and resources. These resources were considered a prerequisite to enable a successful implementation of the adopted Work Plan, the delivery of concrete and pragmatic activities and to achieve tangible results. The principle of co-financing by the Northern Dimension Partners and, when appropriate, from other sources, as spelled out in the Political Declaration on the Northern Dimension Policy was also recalled.

The PAC acknowledged the NDPHS Expert Groups and Associated Expert Groups' expertise and capacity in assisting the Partnership in achieving its goals and objectives, not least through providing policy advice, exchanging best practices, assisting in elaborating programmes as well as developing, implementing and monitoring projects. In this regard, the PAC underlined the importance of continued efforts to create an environment for these groups enabling them to carry out their work, e.g., implementing their own annual work plans as well as contributing to the implementation of the NDPHS Work Plan for 2008 in general.

The PAC recalled that, as decided during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Partnership Annual Conference, the Partnership Co-ordinating and Financing Mechanism is a mechanism through which Partners will make decisions on funding or other contributions and which at the same time stimulates Partners and Participants to formulate their needs in the fields of public health and social well-being, in accordance with national plans.

Consistent with the above, the PAC appreciated contributions to the NDPHS Appropriations Account, which were announced by Partners, as well as other forms of support offered by Partners for the further development of the Partnership and its activities. It also invited all interested actors – both Partners and non-Partners – to contribute to the Partnership Co-ordinating and Financing Mechanism. In this context, the PAC welcomed Finland's announcement to contribute EUR 1.5 million for project development and implementation, and to channel this contribution through the NDPHS Project Pipeline. Further, it supported the idea of a NDPHS-sponsored resource mobilisation (pledging) conference in 2008, bringing together potential donors from the Northern Dimension area and beyond to fund selected projects in the NDPHS Project Pipeline.

## **Partnership Strategy on Health at Work**

As an endorsement body for the outcome document of the pre-PAC Forum “Healthy Life – Healthy Work,” the PAC held extensive discussions about occupational safety and health with broad health content, and adopted the “Partnership Strategy on Health at Work” aimed to reduce non-communicable diseases to benefit the health and well-being of women and men in the work environment.

The PAC noted that this Strategy, the first of its kind in the Partnership, is embodying the core mission of the Partnership: intensifying cooperation between Partner Countries, assisting in capacity building and enhancing coordination between international activities in the Northern Dimension area.

The PAC hoped that this component of the NDPHS’ cooperation will help realise the occupational safety and health strategies of the WHO, the ILO and the European Union with the objective to narrow health, social and economic disparities in the Northern Dimension area. The systematic approach of the Strategy, developing policies, programmes and systems for health at work and linking the public health and occupational health systems will harnesses the resources of both systems for a coherent and effective delivery of health services for the working age population.

Further, the PAC stressed that the adoption of the Strategy carries the duty in front of the people in the Northern Dimension area to turn the words into practice. In this regard, the PAC noted with appreciation that some of the Partners have already during the PAC pledged funding for projects aimed at implementing the Strategy on Health at Work.

While emphasising that further contributions are needed to make decent and healthy work a reality by putting the Partnership’s new Strategy into practice, the PAC noted that the high-level presence of international organisations to a cluster of health and safety related meetings held during recent days in Vilnius was an indicator of their support to the Partnership Strategy as well as to the future international interest towards the follow-up and practical implementation of international strategies for the provision of healthy and safe work for the people in the area.

Finally, while commanding the NDPHS SIHLWA Expert Group, and in particular its Sub-group on Occupational Safety and Health for the preparation of the Strategy, the PAC agreed that similar strategies could be developed in other thematic areas of relevance to the Partnership.

## **Final provisions**

The PAC thanked Lithuania for a very successful Chairmanship of the Partnership during its two-year term, as well as for excellent hosting of the PAC event and the pre-PAC Forum “Healthy Life – Healthy Work.”

The PAC elected Norway as the Partnership Chair and Russia as the Co-Chair for the next two years.

The next Partnership Annual Conference at the ministerial level will be held in 2009.