

Conclusions by the Chair

The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being held its sixth Annual Conference (PAC) on 25 November 2009 in Oslo, Norway. Ms. Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, the Minister of Health and Care Services of Norway, hosted and chaired the Conference. Ministers responsible for health 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 new NDPHS Strategy and the Prison Health as the main themes of the conference. Further, it discussed the progress made by the Partnership as well as correlation between Partnership's activities and implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

Northern Dimension Policy context

The PAC noted the growing number of the partnerships established under the Northern Dimension (ND) policy umbrella, a clear appreciation of this format of regional cooperation and a reflection of the Northern Dimension Partners' commitment to the policy.

The PAC agreed that the current developments in the region and beyond it confirm how much countries depend upon one another, and how important it is to prepare for and address major challenges. International cooperation is also needed to promote positive developments. The NDPHS – which provides a unique platform for concerted action in the social welfare and health care sector through increased cooperation and enhanced coordination of international activities in the region – will continue to play an important role in such efforts and in the implementation of the Northern Dimension Policy.

Progress of the Partnership, the NDPHS Secretariat

The PAC reviewed the progress of the Partnership and approved the NDPHS Progress Report for 2009 submitted by the NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives. A number of tangible results have been delivered by the Partnership through a wide array of concrete and pragmatic activities which included, but were not limited to: information sharing and dialogue, policy development, project development and implementation, networking solidification, expertise exchange, information production and dissemination, advocacy, as well as administrative and organizational issues. The track record of the Partnership's achievements clearly demonstrates that it is doing useful work, which contributes to improving public health and social well-being in the region.

While recognising the important role that the NDPHS Expert Groups play, and will continue to play, in the Partnership's efforts, the PAC expressed its appreciation to Finland, Norway and Sweden for their committed leadership in the Expert Groups, and to other countries and organisations for their involvement and support.

The PAC noted with regret Denmark's decision to change its status within the Partnership from a partner to a participant. It encouraged Denmark to remain involved in the Partnership's activities and continue supporting it.

The PAC noted that, even though the Partnership has been successful on several fronts, there are still some challenges that the Partnership is faced with. One of them is the problem of missing contributions to the Partnership annual budget. The PAC agreed that, in order to be successful in its efforts and ensure that concrete benefits be brought to the people in the region, the Partnership needs to enjoy a commitment of all its Partners. This commitment should be reflected through their active involvement coupled with the provision of ample resources for the work of the Partnership's Expert Groups and the NDPHS Secretariat. To that end, the PAC recalled that the Heads of Government from the Baltic Sea States underlined the importance of continued efforts to deliver concrete results based on the principle of co-financing from the Northern Dimension Partners.

The PAC expressed its support for the expedite concluding of an agreement on the establishment of the NDPHS Secretariat with its own legal capacity, which should, *inter alia*, help ensure financial stability of the Secretariat. To that effect, the Partners intending to establish the NDPHS Secretariat have signed the "Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Establishment of a Secretariat of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being" during the PAC event.

Future direction of the Partnership and its development

The PAC discussed future direction of the Partnership and its development, and noted with satisfaction that – owing to its tools, such as a broad governance framework, a network of outstanding experts, the NDPHS Database and the NDPHS Project Pipeline – the Partnership is well equipped to facilitate or support regional efforts in its own field of expertise.

The PAC adopted a new NDPHS Strategy, which will guide the Partnership's work during the coming four years and builds around the "Vision of the NDPHS in 2013," as approved by the CSR during its meeting on 15-16 October in Riga, Latvia. This strategy places focus on policy and strategy development, as well as coordination and project facilitation. It underlines the need to strengthen the social well-being dimension in the NDPHS work and foresees that the four currently operating NDPHS Expert Groups will be restructured and, where necessary, new groups be established, all of which will focus on the implementation of concrete time-bound actions. Importantly, the strategy identifies goals and corresponding mid-term operational targets and indicators which aim to make the Partnership more responsive to regional challenges and its work more focused on achieving specific, measurable and time-targeted objectives as well as on evaluating its progress.

The PAC welcomed the decision of the European Council on 29-30 October 2009 to adopt an EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Further, it recalled that the Northern Dimension Senior Officials underlined the role of the Northern Dimension as a useful framework for discussing possible constructive cooperation between the EU and the other ND Partners. It appreciated the European Commission's invitation for the NDPHS to take the role of Lead Partner for the coordination of the health sub-area of Priority Area 12 of the EU Strategy Action Plan and welcomed the CSR decision to accept this invitation. While recalling that the new NDPHS Strategy and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region correlate in the health area, it noted with satisfaction that one big step forward in their implementation has already been taken by raising funds for a regional project promoting equitable primary health care.

Further, while underlining the importance of increased Partnership's efforts to successfully implement the new NDPHS Strategy, the PAC adopted the NDPHS Work Plan for 2010.

The PAC agreed that efforts be taken to provide ample resources for the Partnership, most notably for running its Secretariat and the Expert Groups, as well as for the development and facilitation of concrete, project-based activities so that the Partnership would continue both delivering concrete and pragmatic activities and achieving tangible results benefiting people in the region.

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 Partnership. It also invited all interested actors to channel their contribution for project-based activities through the NDPHS Project Pipeline, which is a mechanism to facilitate donor contributions and project application.

The PAC agreed that, for the Partnership to be effective in delivering towards the agreed health- and social well-being policies and actions, it requires proper arrangements and political support back in the Partner Countries. To that effect, the PAC concluded that efforts aimed to increase the Partnership's visibility in the capitals of the Partner Countries need to be strengthened.

NDPHS Declaration on Prison Health

The PAC discussed the outcome of the “Good Prison Health – Better Public Health – Safer Society” side event held the day before. It shared its participants' view that persons in detention have the same right to health care as persons living in the society at large. This event underlined that in spite of cultural and economic differences, the NDPHS Partner Countries face similar challenges, and there is much they can learn from each other.

While commending the NDPHS Prison Health Expert Group for its excellent preparatory work, the PAC adopted the Declaration on Principles of Cooperation between Prison Health and Public Health Services and Development of a Safer Society. This Declaration emphasises that prison health is part of public health. To that end, the NDPHS Partner Countries and Organisations are called upon to facilitate links between prison medical services and public health services; to encourage operation within codes of human rights and medical ethics; to promote rehabilitation as the purpose of incarceration; to decrease exposure to communicable disease and to raise the level of medical care to meet community standards.

The PAC agreed that the implementation of the Declaration as well as the continued work on prison health within the NDPHS will help promote prison health as part of the public health agenda by bringing together the evidence-based knowledge and allowing members to share best practices.

Final provisions

The PAC thanked Norway for successfully chairing the Partnership during its two-year term, as well as for the excellent hosting of the PAC event and the “Good Prison Health – Better Public Health – Safer Society” Conference.

The PAC expressed its appreciation to the NDPHS Secretariat and the Expert Groups for their excellent work and support to the Partnership during the Norwegian Chairmanship.

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

While accepting with appreciation the WHO's offer to host the Partnership Annual Conference at the senior representatives level in 2010, the PAC decided to hold the next ministerial-level Partnership Annual Conference in 2011.