

Conclusions by the Chair

The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being held its eighth Annual Conference (PAC) on 25 November 2011 in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Ms. Tatyana A. Golikova, the Minister of Health and Social Development of the Russian Federation, 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 importance of raising the profile of health and social well-being on the regional agenda as well as the regional cooperation on non-communicable disease prevention and control as the main themes of the conference. Further, it discussed the progress made by the Partnership as well as future actions to achieve the NDPHS priorities. An *Agreement on the Establishment of the Secretariat of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being* was signed during the PAC.

Northern Dimension Policy context

The PAC took note of the Chairman's Conclusions from the third meeting of the Senior Officials (SOM) of the renewed Northern Dimension, which took place in Reykjavik, Iceland, on 8 November 2011, and the NDPHS contributions to the event. The SOM noted progress had been made by all the Northern Dimension structures, among them the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being.

The PAC agreed that the social welfare and health care sector remained an important component in the regional cooperation under the Northern Dimension Policy umbrella. Whilst some challenges requiring a joint regional counteraction endure, new ones have emerged, among them the growing anti-microbial resistance as well as the increasing burden imposed by non-communicable diseases. The NDPHS will continue providing a useful platform for concerted action in this sector by focusing on selected priority actions addressing identified challenges and promoting positive developments. Support and engagement of other relevant stakeholders operating within the Northern Dimension Policy framework or outside it will continue to be encouraged.

Establishment of the NDPHS Secretariat with its own legal capacity

The PAC welcomed the signature by Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Norway, Russia and Sweden of the *Agreement on the Establishment of the Secretariat of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being*. The remaining NDPHS Partner Countries were encouraged to sign the Agreement, too.

The PAC thanked Sweden for agreeing to assume the role of the host country for the NDPHS Secretariat, and Russia for taking up the role of the depositary of the Agreement. Words of

appreciation were also expressed to Norway for her commitment and dedicated efforts in leading and facilitating the process of finalizing the Agreement, and to the Council of the Baltic Sea States for hosting the current NDPHS secretariat service.

The PAC expressed hope for a swift completion of the national legal procedures necessary for the Agreement to enter into force, and for the Host Country Agreement to be subsequently put in place so that the NDPHS Secretariat could become fully operational in the near future.

Finally, the PAC requested the NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives to examine the NDPHS Secretariat's budget modalities in the view of the forthcoming entry into force of the Agreement and decide, as appropriate.

Progress of the Partnership

The PAC reviewed the progress of the Partnership and approved the NDPHS Progress Report for 2011 submitted by the NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives.¹ It appreciated that the Partnership continued running a wide array of concrete and pragmatic activities including, but not limited to, policy development and dialogue, exchange of expertise and information, project development and implementation, information production and dissemination, out-reach and engagement of external actors in regional cooperation for health and social well-being, and advocating higher profile of health and social well-being on the regional cooperation agenda.

The PAC noted with satisfaction that adopted during the ministerial-level PAC in 2009 the new NDPHS Strategy started to bring effects. To that end, it welcomed the new momentum created by the successful reform of the NDPHS structures and thanked the NDPHS Expert Groups and Task Groups for their efforts to deliver tangible results aimed at improving public health and social well-being in the region. It was agreed that further determined and focused efforts are warranted to make the "Vision of the NDPHS in 2013" a reality. To that end, the PAC stressed the need to have a range of pragmatic projects implemented with the Partnership's facilitation, which would address regional challenges and have measurable impact.

The PAC appreciated the Partnership's successful actions to discharge the NDPHS' role as the Lead Partner in the health priority sub-area of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) Action Plan. While recognising the value of the EUSBSR in helping foster the macro-regional cooperation in health and making this cooperation more integrated and inclusive, the PAC emphasised that both health and social dimension should be given in the EUSBSR Action Plan a status adequate to their role and importance in the region's societies.

The PAC appreciated the support provided to the Partnership during the elapsing year. In particular, it thanked Finland, Norway and Sweden for their leadership in the Expert Groups, and Canada, Sweden, the International Labour Organization and the Nordic Council of Ministers for their leadership in the Task Groups. Words of gratitude were also expressed to the European Union, Germany and Sweden for their voluntary financial support, as well as to Norway for the funding offered through the NDPHS Project Pipeline for projects engaging Russia.

The PAC regretted two missing contributions to the Partnership annual budget. While noting that without adequate funding the Partnership will not be able to continue pursuing regional co-operation in the health and social welfare sector of the Northern Dimension Policy, the PAC pleaded to the countries concerned to fulfil their financial pledges consistent with the principle of co-financing.

¹ Available at www.ndphs.org/?doc,NDPHS_Progress_report_for_2011.pdf.

Raising the profile of health and social well-being on the regional agenda

The PAC discussed the status of health and social well-being on the regional agenda. While appreciating the importance attached to the social welfare and health within the Northern Dimension Policy context, the PAC felt these two need to be more widely recognized on other relevant regional cooperation agendas as being of crucial importance for the future of our societies, not least in the wake of the challenges posed by the current economic hurdles as well as the demographic change. Investment in social inclusion and health is not only about containing future health care and social welfare costs. It is also an investment in economic growth. Yet, only a few funding programmes currently operating in the Northern Dimension area have explicitly included health and social well-being among their priorities.

The PAC agreed that transnational cooperation is important for an effective response to health and social well-being challenges. As the European programmes are a useful tool in this regard, it is crucial that health and social well-being be visibly exposed among the funding priorities in the programmes that will be implemented in the Northern Dimension area during the coming period. At the same time, it is necessary to align these programmes with the set priorities and targets, e.g. with those within the framework of the NDPHS Strategy and the EUSBSR Strategy, to avoid fragmentation of efforts.

Having in mind the above, the PAC adopted a NDPHS position paper aimed to raise the profile of health and social well-being² and thanked those stakeholders who engaged in fostering this aim for their support.

NDPHS Action Statement for implementation of the European Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases in the Northern Dimension Partnership Area in 2012-2016

The PAC discussed the outcome of a regional event "Healthy lifestyle – the cornerstone of public health" that was organized by the NDPHS the day before the Partnership Annual Conference. It shared the participants' view that non-communicable diseases (NCD) constitute a major burden and challenge judged by the amount of preventable premature mortality and morbidity threatening economic and human development. The PAC agreed that the NCD prevention and control is the most effective way to contain them, and that the WHO European Action Plans are an important and valuable tool to that end. The NDPHS will contribute, on its part, to the implementation of these plans.

While commending the NDPHS Expert Group on Non-Communicable Diseases related to Lifestyles and Social and Work Environments and the NDPHS Expert Group on Alcohol and Substance Abuse for their preparatory work, the PAC approved the NDPHS *Action Statement for Implementation of the European Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases in the Northern Dimension Partnership area in 2012-2016*.³ The Action Statement aims to help translate respective global and European policies into actions in the Northern Dimension area and calls for strengthened action focusing on individuals to change their lifestyle regarding use of alcohol and tobacco products, diet and physical activity towards healthier behaviour. Further, it stresses the need for our societies to urgently make structural and legislative changes so that healthier choices would be easier for citizens to make and so that availability, as well as price and marketing of harmful and hazardous substances would be kept well under public control. Finally, the PAC requested the NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives to discuss possible further development of the Action Statement.

² Available at [www.ndphs.org/?doc.Post-2013_European-Programmes--Raising_Profile_of_Health_and_Social_Well-being_\(NDPHS_position_paper\).pdf](http://www.ndphs.org/?doc.Post-2013_European-Programmes--Raising_Profile_of_Health_and_Social_Well-being_(NDPHS_position_paper).pdf).

³ Available at www.ndphs.org/?doc.NDPHS_Action_Statement_implementation_of_European_Strategy_for_Prevention_and_Control_of_Noncommunicable_Diseases_in_ND-area_2012-2016.pdf.

Future direction of the Partnership

The PAC discussed the future direction of the Partnership and its development. While recalling that the NDPHS goals and operational targets, which are at the heart of the NDPHS Strategy, aim to make the Partnership's work focused on achieving specific, measurable and time-targeted objectives reflecting regional priorities, the PAC adopted a revised set of goals and operational targets tailored to the current circumstances, needs and priorities of the parties and actors involved. It mandated the NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives to adopt the revised Goal 9 with the associated operational target(s) and indicator(s) when they will have been developed in early 2012.

The PAC recalled the need to strengthen the social well-being dimension in the NDPHS work and noted that the recently initiated cooperation between the NDPHS and the European Social Fund Baltic Sea Network should help achieve this through jointly designed calls for project proposals as well as joint facilitation of project proposals targeting funding from, *inter alia*, the ESF.

While underlining the importance of increased efforts to successfully implement the NDPHS Strategy, the PAC adopted the NDPHS Work Plan for 2012.⁴

Further, while noting the need for the NDPHS Partners and the Partnership structures to continue efforts to raise funds for the development and facilitation of concrete, project-based activities, the PAC appreciated the announced financial contributions to the Partnership, as well as other forms of support offered by Partners for the Partnership.

The PAC reiterated the need for increased efforts aimed to increase the Partnership's visibility in the capitals of the Partner Countries. Both the CSR collectively and the country representatives in the Partnership structures individually have a role to play in this regard. Proper arrangements and political support are necessary for ensuring the Partnership's continued progress in delivering the agreed health- and social well-being policies and actions.

Final provisions

The PAC thanked the Russian Federation for successfully chairing the Partnership during its two-year term, as well as for the excellent hosting of the PAC event and the "Healthy lifestyle – the cornerstone of public health" Conference. It welcomed the outgoing Chair Country's statement that Russia will remain strongly committed to the Partnership.

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

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

While accepting with appreciation Germany's offer to host the Partnership Annual Conference at the senior representatives level in 2012, the PAC decided to hold the next ministerial-level Partnership Annual Conference in 2013.

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⁴ Available at www.ndphs.org/?doc,NDPHS_Work_Plan_for_2012.pdf.