

Statement by Ms Cay Sevon on CBSS Consultation on Northern Dimension

Oslo, 3 May 2000

Notes submitted by the Union of The Baltic Cities:

The UBC, uniting 96 Baltic Sea Region cities (March 2000), greets the opportunity to participate in the consultations in the CBSS on the Northern Dimension action plan. The UBC has strongly supported the development of a Northern Dimension policy of the European Union. The UBC sees its own work as promoting central aspects of what has been presented under the concept of the Northern Dimension.

The UBC shares the objectives set out for the Northern Dimension, namely contributing to the reinforcing positive interdependence between the European Union, the Baltic Sea region and Russia, thereby enhancing security, stability, democratic reforms and sustainable development in the region. (Action Plan, II.7.)

To enhance integration and social cohesion in the region, co-operation between local and regional actors is a necessary complement to state level efforts between Northern Dimension countries.

Cross-Border co-operation of close to border regions is a very important part of regional co-operation in the Baltic Sea area, but the UBC feels that in addition to fighting cross border crime and ensuring effective border management (II.14.; III.85.-88.), a wider scope of activities and participation should be envisaged.

The Northern Dimension has created a political platform for co-operation between the EU, its member states and its partner countries in the European North; the acceding countries Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, the EEA-countries Norway and Iceland as well as the Russian Federation. It has thereby also created a political platform for co-operation on the regional and local level in the same geographical area.

The UBC has member cities in ten of the above mentioned countries: In the EEA-country Norway; the EU member states Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Germany; the acceding Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia; and the Russian Federation, including not only St. Petersburg (present executive board city from Russia) and other cities and towns in Northwest Russia, but also the city of Kaliningrad (previous executive board city from Russia), one of the focal areas of the Northern Dimension. The UBC will therefore have an impact on the implementation and success of the policies of the Northern Dimension.

The UBC members cities are engaged in bi- and multilateral cross-border and transnational co-operation in the priority areas: security, stability, democratic reforms and sustainable development in Northern Europe.

UBC members have actively utilised the financial instruments of the EU (Interreg, Ecos-Ouverture, Recite, Phare, Tacis, the framework research programmes, etc.); of the Nordic Council of Ministers;

of individual countries; of international financial institutions (IFIs), etc., to realise common development projects in the priority areas. The operation of these projects already implements the EU member states prerequisite that the Northern Dimension should be accomplished using existing relevant financial instruments (II.16.).

The UBC has criticised the lack of interoperability and co-ordination of relevant EU-programmes and financial instruments and thus welcomes the intention to make improvement with a view of creating synergies and increasing effectiveness.

The UBC member city projects have included, among others, training for local authorities in acceding countries (stability, democratic reforms), numerous environmental protection, energy co-operation and public health projects (sustainable development), projects in the educational and cultural sectors and youth exchange (all priority areas).

The UBC member cities are engaged in an extensive network of twinning relations. The chair of the Helsinki Foreign Ministers' Conference on the Northern Dimension concluded (12.11.1999) that twinning activities were considered useful and should be continued. The UBC enhances city twinning and hopes that the governmental position will show in increasing financial support for fruitful city twinning projects.

The UBC agrees with the emphasis given to co-operation in the field infrastructure (energy, transport, telecommunications) and natural resources. Cities surrounding the Baltic Sea welcome the stress on environmental protection and work in reducing disparities in the public health sector. The UBC would like to see the Northern Dimension Action Plan recognising local and regional authorities as actors on many if not all of these fields.

Cities and towns are important decision makers, consumers, and often producers, in the energy field (electricity, natural gas, nuclear energy, coal, etc); telecommunications (networks); public health; drinking and sewage water and waste management, etc. They operate ports and develop other transport and transit services, including airports.

Cities co-operate closely with universities in their regions and maintain schools and institutions of higher learning. The UBC wishes, based on the positive experience in the Baltic Sea region, that the importance of universities and other education institutions in economic development as well as disseminating knowledge in the region should also be acknowledged. (III.77.-78.)

Cities are major employers. They are the motors of economic development and innovation in their regions.

Local political leadership represents democracy closest to the people. Only with active participation from cities and towns, can the Northern Dimension succeed.

The Northern Dimension platform is one of equal footing, as the Helsinki Foreign Ministers' Conference demonstrated. Within the UBC, cities and towns co-operate on equal footing independent of their country's international affiliation or status, or the size of their population or economy. The UBC therefore can offer useful experience to the governmental and Union level, not only of co-operation in chosen priority fields, but in implementing the political general principles, as well.

The action plan does not take appropriate notice of the level of local authorities. This is incongruent with the chair's conclusions of the Helsinki Foreign Ministers' Conference, which read: "Closer direct contacts on sub-national level is one of the most promising features of the entire Northern Dimension region. The sub-national participation is crucial in prioritising and implementing projects."

The Commission has repeatedly signalled that the future of European governance lies in co-operation in the form of networking between local, regional, national and supranational authorities. It will propose a White Paper on European governance proposing a new division of labour and a partnership with all levels of governance shaping, proposing, implementing and monitoring policy together. The action plan needs to be revised in this direction in order to promote, in 2000-2003 and thereafter, the solid support from the population that the EU enlargement process requires, in member states as well as in candidate countries and in Russia.

The UBC calls upon the Council of Baltic Sea States to demand, in the forthcoming consultations, a strong recognition of the role played by local authorities in the further development of the Northern Dimension action plan before its adoption by the European Council.

The UBC calls for regional and local authorities to be included in the action plan as Actors (II. 22.-25.).

The UBC welcomes the recognition of the CBSS in the Plan (II.23.;III.93.) and wishes to co-operate with the CBSS and with other regional and sub-regional bodies in order to further develop the action plan.