

The EU's Northern Dimension:

Blurring Frontiers between Russia and the EU North?

Clive Archer / Tobias Etzold

Summary

Whereas the dual enlargements of NATO and the EU have tended to sharpen the distinction between Russia and the EU, the EU's *Northern Dimension* (ND) has encouraged a blurring of the frontiers between Russia and the northern members of the EU and the wider European Economic Area. This article briefly sets out the history of the ND, summarising its most important specific characteristics and also features the role of regional organisations and other actors in the policy. This is followed by an overview of recent developments and meetings leading to a new ND. A detailed analysis of the ND's future perspectives, setting out its strengths and weaknesses, is conducted. A special emphasis is placed on Russia's role within the ND. Finally, the ND and the issue of borders in Northern Europe is considered, with the contention that the special nature of the ND could be lost should it be used as an instrument subservient to the wider EU-Russian relationship.

Zusammenfassung

Die Erweiterungen von NATO und Europäischer Union haben die Abgrenzung zwischen Russland und der EU im Allgemeinen verstärkt. Die *Nördliche Dimension* (ND) der Europäischen Union hingegen hat zu einer Aufweichung der Grenzen zwischen Russland und den nordeuropäischen Staaten der Union und des Gemeinsamen Wirtschaftsraums geführt. Der vorliegende Artikel zeichnet die Geschichte der ND nach, fasst ihre wesentlichsten Charakteristika zusammen und beleuchtet die Rolle regionaler Organisationen und anderer Akteure im Rahmen dieser Politik. Es folgt ein Überblick über die jüngsten Entwicklungen und Treffen, in deren Folge eine neue ND erarbeitet worden ist. Vor diesem Hintergrund werden deren zukünftige Perspektiven, Stärken und Schwachpunkte analysiert, wobei besonderes Augenmerk auf die Rolle Russlands gelegt wird. Abschließend wird die These aufgestellt, dass der besondere Charakter der ND verloren zu gehen droht, wenn diese den allgemeinen Beziehungen der EU zu Russland untergeordnet wird.

Prof. Clive Archer is Director of the Manchester European Research Institute at Manchester Metropolitan University. Contact: c.archer@mmu.ac.uk. Tobias Etzold, M.A. is a PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University. Contact: tobias.etzold@student.mmu.ac.uk

Introduction*

In post-Cold War Europe, the enlargements of NATO and the EU have been interpreted in a number of ways. This article refers to Northern Europe and the effect that the dual expansion – especially that of the EU – has had on the region, and the way that the *Northern Dimension* (ND) initiative of the EU may affect an understanding of enlargement. In particular, any view of enlargement is bound to affect views of borders and boundaries in Northern Europe, not least those between “the West” and Russia. Whereas the dual enlargements have tended to sharpen the distinction between Russia and the EU, the EU’s *Northern Dimension* has encouraged a blurring of the frontiers between Russia and the northern members of the EU (and the wider European Economic Area), namely Poland, the three Baltic states and the Nordic countries. This article explains why this has been the case and contends that the special nature of the ND could be lost should it be used as an instrument subservient to the wider EU-Russian relationship.

In the 1990s, the EU increased the divergence between its internal and its external borders, and thus between members and non-members. With the Schengen Agreement, the internal borders between the EU’s member states nearly ceased to exist, but external borders with non-EU-member states were fortified. Candidate states had to prove that they were able to meet the provisions of the Schengen Agreement in terms of securing their external borders. Meant as a security measure to protect Europe from cross-border organised crime and illegal trade and trafficking, this requirement also makes legal cross-border trade, which for instance for many people in Ukraine and Belarus formed an important source of income, difficult if not impossible.

Perhaps one of the most common views of what happened in Northern Europe after the end of the Cold War, and the prospect of the dual enlargement of NATO and the EU, has been the neo-realist approach whereby the West was seen to expand at the cost of Russia. If one compares the map of Northern Europe before the end of the Cold War – the Baltic Sea as a *Mare Sovieticum* – to that of the region afterwards – with the Baltic

* This article is based on papers presented at a “Workshop on borders and bordering” at the University of Manchester, December 1, 2006, and a conference on borders at the University of Leiden, March 30 2007.

Sea as a *Mare Europaeum*¹ –, then the strategic shift has been clearly in favour of the West and to the detriment of Russia. The border retreated from Szczecin to St. Petersburg. Nevertheless, Russia remained as a power to be reckoned with, not least because the US was no longer paying the sort of attention to Northern Europe that it did in the Cold War. Official thinking in Norway was particularly insistent on not having to face Russia itself across not only a land frontier but also an undefined maritime border.²

However, there has been another more liberal institutionalist interpretation of what has happened in Northern Europe in the past fifteen years. This views the events there as not creating a new sharp divide, as described above. Yes, East Germany has become part of the Federal Republic; Sweden and Finland have joined the EU; the Baltic states and Poland have joined both the EU and NATO; and Russia remains outside these organisations. Yet even this organisational neatness hides a complexity. While NATO aircraft protect Baltic states' skies, there are no NATO troops on their soil. Sweden is not part of the European Monetary Union, and Norway and Iceland are members of the European Economic Area rather than the EU. Yet, Iceland and Norway as non-EU member states belong to the Schengen area. A compromise has been found, which applies the provisions of Schengen in a less strict form for transit between the Russian enclave Kaliningrad and the Russian mainland after the EU accession of Lithuania and Poland. Also there is the ND which is now run jointly by the EU, Russia, Iceland and Norway. In policy terms the ND has, over almost a decade, encouraged and sponsored policies that involve partnerships with Russia and have treated Kaliningrad as a special place, a Russian enclave in the EU cut off from the Russian mainland after EU accession by Lithuania and Poland. Writers such as Pami Aalto have identified the ND as helping to overcome the divide between the EU and Russia in the north and making the divergence between the external and internal, less sharp. In that, it contrasts with the wider EU – and indeed Western – sceptical view of Russia by dealing with practical functional problems jointly, rather than tackling 'high' policies in a strategic way.³

¹ Tassinari, Fabrizio: *Mare Europaeum. Baltic Sea Security and Co-operation from post-Wall to post-Enlargement Europe*. Copenhagen 2004.

² Archer, Clive: *Norway outside the European Union. Norway and European integration from 1994 to 2004*. London / New York 2005, 138–145.

³ Aalto, Pami: *European Union and the Making of a Wider Northern Europe*. London / New York 2006.

The creation of the ND can be seen as a consequence of developments allowing a third interpretation of the situation in the Nordic-Baltic region from the early 1990s. From the beginning of the 1990s, Western European countries tried to include Russia in international co-operation. Regional organisations such as the *Council of the Baltic Sea States* (CBSS), the *Barents Euro Arctic Council* (BEAC) and the *Arctic Council* (AC) were established in North-Eastern Europe. Within these organisations, Russia has co-operated side by side with other countries on an equal footing. The final goal of these co-operative efforts was to integrate Russia in a way that would have transcended the need to alleviate regional dividing lines. This goal, however, has been only partially achieved. While providing important political forums, dialogue and debate, these organisations were too weak (politically, legally, organisationally and financially) to make a real difference in terms of implementing concrete projects and policies. Though generally interested in co-operation within these organisations, in practice Russia remained a reluctant and unpredictable partner. The dividing lines remained, not least prompted by the EU and NATO enlargement processes at the end of the 1990s. In this context, the Finnish ND initiative is a new attempt to alleviate the remaining dividing lines in a regional context, and one that has had some success. However, the more the initiative is taken away from its functional, regional “low politics” roots, as stressed in the second interpretation above, the greater the danger that it becomes tainted by the wider political difficulties of Russia-European relations. This view sees only a limited prospect for liberal institutionalist links with a Russia that is stressing a more neo-realist approach in its relations with Europe.

This article briefly sets out the history of the ND, summarising its most important specific characteristics and also features the role of regional organisations and other actors in the policy. This is followed by an overview of recent developments and meetings leading to a new ND. On that basis, a detailed analysis of the ND’s future perspectives, setting out its strengths and weaknesses, is conducted. In this context a special emphasis is placed on Russia’s role within the ND. Finally, the ND and the issue of borders in Northern Europe is considered and it is examined in terms of the three perspectives mentioned above.

History of the Northern Dimension

The idea of a Northern Dimension policy emerged in 1997 as a Finnish initiative. At that time, the main incentive behind the initiative was to increase attention towards North-Eastern Europe and to address new challenges and special development needs in

the region. These emerged with the significant changes in the 1990s – the collapse of the Soviet Union, the regained independence of the Baltic States, and the accession of Sweden and Finland to the EU – and with the opportunities the region has to offer in respect of political, economic, cultural and scientific matters. On the macro-level, the principal objective of the initiative was from the start to provide added value through reinforced co-ordination and complementarity of the EU's and individual member states' initiatives towards the region. It aimed at enhanced co-operation between all the countries in North-Eastern Europe.⁴ In geographical terms, the ND covers the entire Baltic Sea region, North-West Russia, Norway, Iceland, the Barents region and the Arctic region. The ND established a political framework for co-operation between EU member states, the then candidate countries Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as well as Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation. The USA and Canada have observer status. Because of its wish to enhance co-operation between EU members and non-members and to include the non-members in the decision-making and policy implementation processes, the ND has developed a partner-oriented approach.⁵ The ND, dealing both with internal as well as external policies of the EU, offers a common framework for the promotion of policy dialogue and concrete co-operation.

After the adoption of *Guidelines for the implementation of the Northern Dimension by the European Council* in Cologne in 1999, the European Council in Feira, Portugal, endorsed the first *Action Plan for the Northern Dimension* in the external and cross-border policies, 2001–2003, in June 2000. This *Northern Dimension Action Plan* (NDAP) set out objectives, areas to be addressed and means by which to achieve the goals. Main areas to be addressed within the first NDAP were: infrastructure (including transport, energy and telecommunication); environment and nuclear safety; education, research, training and human resources development; public health and social

⁴ Council of the European Union: *Northern Dimension – Action Plan for the Northern Dimension with external and cross-border policies of the European Union 2000–2003*. 9401/00, June 14, 2000 (http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/north_dim/ndap/06_00_en.pdf, February 20, 2008), 2.

⁵ Catellani, Nicolas: “Outlining the Northern Dimension: toward regional co-operation in Northern Europe”. In: Idem and Antonio Missiroli: *The European Union's Northern Dimension*. Rome: Laboratorio CeSPI, 2000 (http://www.cespi.it/Laboratorio/Lab__1=2000.pdf, February 21, 2008), 12.

administration; cross-border co-operation, trade and investment and the fight against, in particular, cross-border crime.⁶

As from 2002, ND stakeholders started preparing the second NDAP, 2004–2006. This happened against a shifting background with Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania set to become EU members in May 2004. The new Action Plan was intended to provide a clearer framework for all ND partners, as, for some, the previous plan had failed to do so, and to establish clear and feasible strategic objectives, priorities and concrete activities in the above mentioned issue areas which basically remained the same, though slightly restructured. Additionally, the second NDAP introduced two so-called cross-cutting themes, the Arctic region and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation as regions with specific development needs in nearly all ND issue areas.⁷

In 2001, a *Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership* was launched by international financial institutions, which in co-operation with the European Commission and the Russian Federation, implement and finance projects in the environmental sector. In 2003, a *Northern Dimension Partnership on Public Health and Social Wellbeing* was formed as part of the ND framework dealing in particular with the prevention of communicable diseases such as HIV and TB. These partnerships present the concrete and practical side of the ND at the micro-level. Furthermore, at this level the ND consists of all the activities that the different actors conduct on a practical level in the ND area.⁸

In general, the ND was not intended to create structures and institutions of its own. The initiative basically relies on existing infrastructure, instruments, institutions, skills and expertise provided by the EU and its partners. The ND also does not have a special budget. Projects within the ND are financed by EU financial instruments such as

⁶ Council of the EU 2000, as footnote 4.

⁷ Commission of the European Communities: *Commission Working Document: The second Northern Dimension Action Plan 2004–2006, COM (2003) 343 final* (http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/north_dim/ndap/ap2.pdf, February 20, 2008), 13–15.

⁸ Tuomioja, Erkki: “The Northern Dimension and the Finnish EU Presidency”. Speech given at the Conference on *The Renewed Northern Dimension: A Tool for Enhanced Regional and Cross-border Co-operation* in Tallinn, June 9, 2006 (http://www.vm.ee/eng/euro/kat_314/7593.html, February 20, 2008), 2.

TACIS (*Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States*), as far as they apply to the Russian Federation. Also INTERREG, one of EU's four joint programmes in the field of European regional/structural policies, and in particular its INTERREG IIIb Baltic Sea programme (now *Baltic Sea region programme 2007–2013*) and cross-border co-operation programmes, are crucial in financing the ND. Before enlargement, one of the pre-accession instruments, PHARE (*Poland and Hungary: Aid for Restructuring of the Economies*), was important for the Baltic States and Poland. Besides these EU financing instruments, national governments as well as European and Nordic financial institutions, are also involved in ND project financing, particularly the *Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership*. Taking the involvement of different EU instruments and institutions into account, the ND strives for their horizontal co-ordination.⁹ As of 2007, the new *European Neighbourhood Instrument* could become instrumental for financing ND projects and should partly replace the previous financial instruments in order to simplify the complicated procedures, with different instruments and rules for the various groups of countries.

Another special and, particularly from a political science viewpoint, interesting feature of the ND is the involvement of a number of actors – stakeholders – at various levels and of differing political and economic weights. Northern Europe is characterised by an institutional complexity with organisations that, partly, include Russia. Alongside national governments and EU institutions, regional organisations in North-Eastern Europe contributed considerably to the elaboration and implementation of the ND and in particular the second Action Plan. This involves the CBSS, AC, BEAC, Nordic Council (NC), Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), various parliamentary conferences and many other small and medium, partly sub-regional organisations, initiatives and programmes such as the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation and the Union of Baltic Cities. At the ND Ministerial Meeting in November 2005, the Foreign Ministers, discussing the ND policies after 2006, praised the

⁹ Lannon, Erwan and Peter Van Elsuwege: “The EU's Northern Dimension and the EMP-ENP: Institutional Frameworks and Decision-Making Processes Compared”. In: Peter G. Xuereb (ed.): *The European Union and the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean's European Challenge*. Malta 2004, 3–70, 26.

efforts carried out by AC, BEAC, CBSS and NCM.¹⁰ These organisations have the official status of ND stakeholders or partners with a role in the implementation process. The guidelines for the future ND policies identified the regional bodies as important actors within the ND as they cover a wide range of co-operation issues in their respective areas. The guidelines stated that “the ND aims to enhance the synergies of these organisations, maximising the use of the resources available for the region, while avoiding any possible overlapping”¹¹. This last point is of particular importance as the risk for overlap and double structures is high, due to the large number of organisations and initiatives in North-Eastern Europe with a partly similar topical and geographical focus. The need for efficient co-ordination and closer co-operation between the ND actors can therefore not be underestimated. The new ND policy framework document outlines as tasks for the regional councils to “identify needs for development and co-operation in their respective areas and support project implementation in different ways”¹².

To some extent, the ND can be regarded as being unique. It is a co-operation programme in-between Community policies and initiatives within the Common Foreign and Security Policies (CFSP), but at the same time it also includes policies and objectives from the field of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA). It is an EU based initiative but allows and even encourages contributions and involvement of other actors. It involves international parliamentary bodies, non-governmental and trans-national organisations, for example those bringing together cities or businesses or indigenous peoples in the region. It tries to engage the full range of civil society. Because of this involvement, the ND can be labelled as an example of potential multi-level or network governance

¹⁰ Council of the European Union: *Joint Press Release on the IV Northern Dimension Ministerial Meeting, held in Brussels on November 21, 2005, 14701/05 (Presse 305)* (http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/north_dim/doc/press_release_05.pdf, 20 February 2008).

¹¹ Council of the European Union: *Guidelines for the development of a political declaration and a policy framework document for the Northern Dimension Policy from 2007, 14358/1/05 REV I*, (http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/north_dim/doc/guidelines05.pdf, February 20, 2008), 2.

¹² Finland's EU Presidency: *Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document* (http://www.eu2006.fi/news_and_documents/other_documents/vko47/en_GB/1164359527520/, February 20, 2008).

and an opportunity for multi-level policy infusion. To some extent, the ND cuts across the EU's three-pillar structure and includes both external and internal policies: implementation and financing instruments are home-based in the first pillar (European Communities), the objectives and the problems to be addressed stem from the second (CFSP) and the third (JHA).¹³

Recent meetings, developments and prospects

The second NDAP expired by the end of 2006, and this could have been the end of the story. The ND had entered a trough in the early 2000s: The candidate states had their minds on accession; Russia seemed not bothered by it; and general interest among other than Nordic EU member states appeared to be rather low. The initiative really depended on the Nordic EU members keeping it going, and when Sweden failed to mention it in its 2001 presidency priorities, it seemed that it might fade away. So it was by no means self-evident that, at the start of 2007, the ND would enter a new stage with some important renewals, not least joint ownership, which would breathe new life into this policy. This became possible, since a modest renaissance in the fortunes of the ND, witnessed in 2005. Then, several high-level meetings were held, where politicians and academics praised the ND.

In September 2005, the European Parliament discussed the ND and then passed a composite resolution which, inter alia, states: "The Northern Dimension entails both new potential and challenges [...] preventing the emergence of new barriers [...]".¹⁴ In order to streamline and upgrade the EU's activities in the Baltic Sea region, the EP has called on the Commission to include a Baltic Sea Strategy, dealing with internal policies of the EU, in the forthcoming ND proposal.¹⁵ On that basis, in 2006, the EP has

¹³ Ojanen, Hanna: "The EU and Its 'Northern Dimension': an actor in search of a policy, or a policy in search of an actor?". In: *European Foreign Affairs Review* 5 (2000:3), 359–376, 374.

¹⁴ European Parliament: *Joint Resolution on the future of the Northern Dimension, P6-TA-PROV(2005)0430*, Strasbourg 2005 ([http://www.europarl.eu.int/registre/seance_pleniere/textes_adoptes/definitif/2005/11-16/0430/P6_TA\(2005\)0430_EN.doc](http://www.europarl.eu.int/registre/seance_pleniere/textes_adoptes/definitif/2005/11-16/0430/P6_TA(2005)0430_EN.doc), February 20, 2008).

¹⁵ Ibid.

drafted and adopted a proposal for such an EU Baltic Sea strategy and urged the European Commission to take this further.

The British EU Presidency chaired a ND ministerial meeting held in the margins of the General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels, on 21 November 2005. This was attended by the foreign ministers of the member states of the EU as well as Norway, Iceland and Russia, representatives of the major regional organisations in the ND area, international financial institutions and EU institutions. This can be compared with the inauspicious counterpart during the Finnish Presidency in 1999, attended by less than a handful of foreign ministers. Also the press release from the 2005 meeting made a number of positive points about the ND, including “the new Northern Dimension concept will provide a stable and permanent basis for this policy”¹⁶. For the first time, the new ND will not be limited to a specified period of time. This might enable the ND to gain a more permanent character. Instead of issuing a third Action Plan, ND partners agreed to negotiate a *Joint Political Declaration on the Northern Dimension Policy* and a *Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document*. This was of a more political character than the previous action plans.¹⁷ For the purpose of preparing these documents, the Council of the EU elaborated *Guidelines for the Northern Dimension Policy from 2007*, outlining the future structure and contents, which were adopted during that meeting. The Finnish EU Presidency in the second half of 2006, held several ND high-level meetings preparing the new ND documents. The new ND documents were adopted in November 2006 during a ND summit – comprising high EU representatives, the President of the Russian Federation and the prime ministers of Norway and Iceland – at the margins of an EU-Russia Summit in Helsinki.

The next stage: An analysis of trends in the ND

There was clearly a political willingness to continue the ND policy beyond 2006. Taking previous problems and doubts into consideration, continuation was not self-evident. An important development in enhancing the initiative may have been that interest in the ND started to reach beyond the Nordic-Baltic area. Also relevant in up-

¹⁶ Council of the European Union 2005, as footnote 10.

¹⁷ Tuomioja 2006, as footnote 8, 3.

grading the status of the ND, has been the strengthening of the group of Baltic Sea states within the EU after enlargement. It is a positive sign that the British EU Presidency prepared the fourth ND Ministerial Meeting in November 2005 and contributed to the elaboration of the new guidelines, though the UK had to be prompted a little by the Finns and Swedes. The elaboration and adoption of the new policy framework document and the political declaration and therefore the future of the ND relied to a great extent on the 2006 Finnish Presidency. The ND had come “home”, so to speak. But the groundwork for a future ND was already laid through the adoption of the new guidelines. Since the November 2005 ND ministerial meeting, national governments, the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the regional organisations have done their “homework” by preparing the new framework documents and their specific contributions.

Generally, the EU accession of the three Baltic States and Poland could potentially open up new opportunities to build a strong North-Eastern European and/or Baltic Sea bloc within the EU. In this context, the ND could become instrumental as a framework for promoting specific regional co-operation and assisting in better co-ordination of the various efforts in the North-Eastern part of the EU. As the Baltic Sea region still has to cope with various challenges and problems, any failure in this area would represent a lost chance. Finnish Foreign Trade Minister Paavo Väyrynen reminded participants in a ND seminar at the Technical University of Lappeenranta in May 2007, “that the Northern Dimension also has a role in the EU's internal policies”¹⁸. He stressed in particular cross-border co-operation, with its potential to enhance economic and social development on both sides of the EU border, and the protection of the Baltic Sea environment as internal EU issues in need of addressing by internal policies and programmes of the EU.¹⁹

¹⁸ Address by Mr. Paavo Väyrynen, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, at the Northern Dimension Seminar *The Renewed Northern Dimension Policy and the Next Steps – Focus on Energy Efficiency, Innovations and Logistics* in Lappeenranta on May 31 – June 1, 2007, Speeches 5/31/2007 (www.norden2007.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=92256&nedeid=36240&contentlan=2&culture=en-US, February 20, 2008).

¹⁹ Ibid.

The proposal of the EP to launch an EU Baltic Sea strategy²⁰ as a vital part of the ND is both useful and sensible. Also, the working structures and co-operation partners of the CBSS emphasised the need to maintain the broad geographical scope of the ND including the Baltic Sea Region, the Arctic and the Barents areas and North-West Russia.²¹ Obviously, these calls have been heard, as the Barents and the Baltic Seas are listed as new geographical priorities in the documents. Baltic Sea regional intergovernmental co-operation as such is likely to be continued, in what forms and with what content, however, needs to be seen. CBSS foreign ministers, at their latest meeting in Malmö in June 2007, reached a consensus that the CBSS needs to be reformed in order to remain relevant and to be able to tackle future challenges.²² They also welcomed the elaboration of an EU Baltic Sea strategy,²³ which could be utilised as a strong umbrella for all the various co-operation efforts in the region. It is, however, an open question whether Russia would be willing to accept an EU strategy as the overall framework for Baltic Sea co-operation.

More ND partnerships – for instance in education, transport, infrastructure and communications, and with some impact on energy issues – could be a way to make the ND more concrete, practical, effective and transparent. The Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership is broadly perceived as successful, and also within the Partnership on Social Health and Wellbeing, some important progress could be achieved. In the latter, the long organisational stage is due to be completed and the project work to be

²⁰ European Parliament: *Parliamentary Conference on the Northern Dimension. Conference Statement*. March 1, 2007 (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/euro/jpc/deea/documents/20070301_conference_statement.pdf, February 20, 2008).

²¹ Council of the Baltic Sea States: *Council of the Baltic Sea States' survey on the Northern Dimension beyond 2006. Final Report by CBSS Secretariat Senior Adviser Philipp Schwartz*. Stockholm 2006 (http://www.cbss.st/documents/euand_baltic_region/eund/cbssurveyonthendbeyond2006finalweb.pdf, February 20, 2008), 8.

²² Council of the Baltic Sea States: *Declaration of the Council of the Baltic Sea States in Malmö on June 13, 2007 on a renewed Baltic Sea States Co-operation* (<http://www.cbss.org/baltinfo/dbaFile14511.doc>, February 20, 2008).

²³ Ibid.

started.²⁴ These partnerships are regarded as well-functioning examples of co-operation between different actors when also the required financial means are made available. The Finnish Foreign Minister even labelled these partnerships as the great achievements of the ND.²⁵ Plans for establishing a ND partnership on transport and logistics seem to be active. The Nordic Investment Bank showed its interest in financing such partnership and issued a feasibility study which was introduced at a meeting in Brussels in June 2007. As long as such a partnership will not lead to duplications with current EU transport programmes and there are clear commitments on all sides,²⁶ most stakeholders welcome these plans, since well-functioning transport and logistics chains are regarded as a prerequisite for the competitiveness and economic growth of the region.²⁷

In order to enhance coordination and to support the European Commission in exerting its lead role in the initiative, Finland proposed the establishment of a common body in the form of a joint steering group meeting regularly and including the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland.²⁸ Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja saw a small operative body, in addition to the present biannual ministerial and senior officials' meetings, as ensuring efficient implementation and follow-up.²⁹ This certainly would be an important step to tackle the everlasting problem of failing co-ordination and overlap, and also it would have the potential to provide the ND with clearer leadership.

The new policy framework document contains provisions in this respect. Until August 2007, the newly established steering group had met twice. Whereas the first meeting dealt with organisational issues, the second one discussed concrete contents and pro-

²⁴ Avetisyan, Andrey: "Russia and the Northern Dimension Policy." Speech at a seminar on *The renewed Northern Dimension Policy and the next steps – focus on Energy Efficiency, Innovations and Logistics* at the Lappeenranta University of Technology, May 31 – June 1, 2007 [mimeographed].

²⁵ Tuomioja 2006, as footnote 8, 2.

²⁶ Herman, Janos: "Speaking points. Promoting the new Northern Dimension." Speech on behalf of the European Commission at a seminar on *The renewed Northern Dimension Policy and the next steps – focus on Energy Efficiency, Innovations and Logistics* at the Lappeenranta University of Technology, May 31 – June 1, 2007 [mimeographed].

²⁷ Väyrynen 2007, as footnote 18.

²⁸ Tuomioja 2006, as footnote 8, 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

jects. While generally agreeing with the advantages of a steering group and regular meetings, the European Commission holds the position that the ND should remain a policy and not become an institution with its own budget.³⁰ The number of groups and meetings should be kept to a minimum.³¹ Against the light of this attitude, the initial idea of establishing a ND secretariat for co-ordination purposes never was a serious nor feasible option. The Commission's line, however, is debatable as several international programmes have their own secretariat and even within the framework of the ND, the two existing partnerships run their own small secretarial unit integrated in another organisation. A ND secretariat, preferably within the existing structures of one of the regional organisations, could have been a way to enhance the co-ordination of activities and the visibility of the policy.

While identifying the above signs in favour of the ND policy's active continuation, less positive indications cannot be denied. According to some observers, interest in and commitment to the ND have hardly exceeded the Nordic-Baltic area. While in particular Finland and Sweden and, to a less extent, Denmark still support the initiative and develop new ideas, interests by EU members south of the ND region is much less developed.³² From Germany, the largest and in political, as well as economic terms, most potent EU member state in the Baltic Sea region, little has been heard regarding the ND.³³ In the past, the ND was only high on the EU agenda when one of its Nordic member states was in charge of the EU Presidency.³⁴ As this is not likely to change, the ND may only return to the EU agenda after the EU Presidencies of Portugal, Slovenia and France, when Sweden takes on the presidency in 2009. The same applies to the elaboration of a possible EU Baltic Sea strategy. Others have expressed doubts a-

³⁰ Herman 2007, as footnote 26, 2.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Heikkilä, Markku: "Europa-Ryssland – viktig fråga i finsk politik". In: *Analys norden* 26-04-2006 (<http://www.analysnorden.org/analysorden/artikkel.asp?id=404>, February 20, 2008), 3.

³³ At least, Germany has allocated 10 million Euro to the ND environmental partnership; Finland's EU Presidency: *The EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland approve a renewed Northern Dimension policy*, Press Release November 24, 2006 (http://eu2006.fi/news_and_documents/press_releases/vko47/en_GB/175523/, February 20, 2008).

³⁴ Van Elsuwege, Peter: "The Common Spaces in EU-Russia relations and the future of the Northern Dimension". In: Clive Archer (ed.): *The Northern Dimension of the European Union: Glancing back, looking forward*. Kaunas 2007, 37–46, 28.

bout the ND's present situation and its future: the European Parliament considers the ND policy to still have a low profile and to suffer from a lack of co-ordination between the actors.³⁵ According to the former secretary-general of the Nordic Council of Ministers, Per Unckel, the ND never was of high relevance for the NCM, but basically a Finnish-Russian affair with some EU support.

Also, a certain competition amongst the various sub-regions in North-Eastern Europe covered by the ND can be identified. At the first parliamentary ND conference in Brussels in early 2007, representatives of the regional parliamentary assemblies strongly pushed the case of their respective sub-region (for instance Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, Barents Parliamentary Conference). The Minister of State in the German Foreign Office, Günter Gloser, warned of the creation of competition between the regions and regions being played off against each other.³⁶ It will be one of the most sensitive tasks of the ND and its stakeholders to treat all these sub-regions equally, allowing them all to profit from the policy.

To base the new ND on a political declaration and a framework policy document instead of a new time-limited action plan, generates both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the ND may gain a more permanent and political character, which might be a way to upgrade the policy politically from its present low level. A disadvantage could be that, while becoming more political, the new ND documents might be less technical and therefore less operational, one of the strong points of the second NDAP. In consequence, the risk of losing its operational character might make the new ND vaguer, creating in the worst case a sliding back into the first ND phase when general interest was low and the objectives and means insufficiently concrete and operational. The new documents, covering in total only eight pages, may be seen as having a certain generality and not being too concrete about the priority sectors, the implementation of set objectives and, again, the role of the regional organisations within the ND framework. However, whether this will impede the implementation of the ND or whether the ND and its implementation mechanisms are so well-established that further official written instructions are obsolete, remains to be seen.

³⁵ European Parliament 2005, as footnote 14, 2.

³⁶ European Parliament 2007, as footnote 20, 13.

As one of the most obvious problems has previously been overlap and lack of effective co-ordination, an important requirement for the new ND documents and the new ND in general was to define more clearly the role of the different actors involved. In particular, attention should be given to the role of the regional organisations and to developing mechanisms for efficient co-ordination and division of labour. This is the more important as the ND will have to rely on the active involvement of the regional organisations, regarded by some as the most important ND actors.³⁷ Future success of the ND will depend, to some extent, on smooth interaction and co-operation between the institutions involved, resulting in a clear and transparent decision-making and implementation process. The common goals of the ND will only have a realistic chance of achievement if it becomes obvious who has what responsibilities and duties, if the decision-making and policy-implementation processes are clearly outlined in the policy framework documents and if they can effectively be translated from theory to practice. On the efficient involvement of regional organisations, a clear indication of what such organisations can and should do, and what will be expected from them, would be helpful. However, as stated above, the new policy framework document was not more specific about the role of the regional organisations than its predecessors. But, possibly, the new ND steering group could be a more efficient way to enhance co-ordination among the participants.

An important aspect of the ND in the future may be the closer involvement of parliamentary actors. The political declaration called for the establishment of a Northern Dimension parliamentary forum.³⁸ In February/March 2007, representatives of various regional inter-parliamentary bodies and the European Parliament gathered in Brussels and agreed on a joint communiqué in which they expressed their support for the ND's joint ownership and its overall aim to provide a common framework for the promotion of dialogue and concrete co-operation.³⁹ This parliamentary involvement and engagement was welcomed by, for instance, the European Commission. In the words of the

³⁷ Heikkilä 2006, as footnote 32, 3.

³⁸ Finland's EU Presidency: *Political Declaration on the Northern Dimension Policy*, 24 November 2006 (http://www.eu2006.fi/news_and_documents/other_documents/vko47/en_GB/1164359083277/, 20 February 2008).

³⁹ European Parliament 2007, as footnote 20, 1.

Vice-President of the Commission, Margot Wallström, “mobilising the support from Parliaments across the region will be essential to ensure the new Northern Dimension Policy’s success”.⁴⁰ They may be particularly helpful in promoting the value of cross-border co-operation.⁴¹ Parliamentary organisations might be able, due to their direct links to the public, to raise the attention of the people to EU policies which to some extent affect their life and, again in Wallström’s words, “to promote better understanding and contribute to a better life for its citizens”.⁴² The parliamentary bodies have shown that they have the will, ability and expertise to contribute actively to the implementation of the ND. This potential could and should be utilised more consequently.

The role of Russia

In the medium term, relations with Russia in North-Eastern Europe will be the crucial aspect of the ND. Because of general economic interdependency, the consequences of the shift in economic relations between the Russian Federation and other states are important for the states and societies in the region, in particular in the field of energy. The new policy framework stresses functional co-operation, in particular in the areas of economics including trade, investments, energy, infrastructure, transport and logistics, and the environment. Also freedom, security and justice, in particular the fight against organised crime, external security (civil protection), research, education and culture and social welfare and health were listed as important areas for future co-operation in the policy framework document.⁴³ In geographical terms, a specific focus will remain on Kaliningrad and the Arctic as well as sub-arctic areas, but two addi-

⁴⁰ Address of Margot Wallström to the European Parliament conference on the *Northern Dimension*. Speech on behalf of Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, Brussels, 28 February 2007, SPEECH/07/111 (<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/07/111&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>, 20 February 2008).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Finland’s EU Presidency 2006, as footnote 12, 3–4.

tional geographical priorities were introduced with the Barents and the Baltic Seas.⁴⁴ All these are areas where the EU and EEA meet Russia. Cross-border co-operation enhancing regional development, involvement of civil society and people-to-people contacts will continue to be an important theme within the ND.⁴⁵ With regard to financing, the principle of co-financing from ND partners and international and private financial institutions will be the general rule.⁴⁶

Another, and maybe the most important, encouraging indicator for the future of the ND is an increased willingness by the Russians, to be involved actively. Although a considerable part of the policy was dedicated to co-operation with North-West Russia in previous phases, for some time the Russian government did not show a strong interest in the ND. One of the reasons for this low-key interest might have been that the country did not feel treated as an equal partner by the EU in the decision-making and implementation processes. In 2004, the Finnish Foreign Ministry pursued diplomatic efforts to upgrade Russia's position and, backed by the Swedish government, achieved a breakthrough at the ND Ministerial Meeting in November 2005.⁴⁷ The press release of the meeting mentioned explicitly that Russia, as an equal partner, would participate in the drafting and adoption process of the new ND documents.⁴⁸ Co-operation within the ND would be tied to the general guidelines of EU-Russian co-operation.⁴⁹ This development enables Moscow to act increasingly as policy-maker, or policy co-maker, rather than in the obviously disliked role of policy-taker. All this would seem to suggest that Pami Aalto was correct in assuming that the ND helps to overcome the divide between the EU and Russia in the north.⁵⁰

The adoption by the EU, Iceland, Norway and Russia of the new ND strategy reveals its most important aspect: the joint ownership by the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1; Commission of the European Communities: *A new impetus to the "Northern Dimension"*, Press Release November, 23 2006, IP/06/1616 (<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1616&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>, February 20, 2008).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5; Finland's EU Presidency 2006, as footnote 12, 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁷ Heikkilä 2006, as footnote 32, 3.

⁴⁸ Council of the EU 2005, as footnote 10, 1.

⁴⁹ Heikkilä 2006, as footnote 32, 3.

⁵⁰ Aalto 2006, as footnote 4.

However, in the future, the ND will become more instrumental as a regional expression of the four Common Spaces⁵¹ forming the core of the future EU-Russia strategic partnership.⁵² According to the new ND documents, the current ND issue areas will be re-focused in line with the four Common Spaces.⁵³ Nowadays the ND is not just described as a regional expression of the four Common Spaces of EU-Russia relations, but is also used as a positive example of the EU's "New Neighbourhood policy", addressing the neighbouring countries of the enlarged EU. By this token, the future ND could also increasingly involve Ukraine and, possibly, Belarus. Thus the new ND could even more be understood as an approach of the EU to co-operate with the regions at its external borders, thus creating new opportunities for the ND.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, a reservation should be entered here. This new placing of the ND within the wider EU-Russian relations could mean that the ND also increasingly becomes a hostage to this wider relationship rather than a possible exception to it. After all, the recent history of the links between the EU and Russia has not been too positive.

The move to the four Common Spaces was an attempt to put some content back into sagging EU-Russian relations. It was a more positive response, by both sides, to difficulties that arose within the relationship with the consequences of the Schengen visa regime for Kaliningrad after EU enlargement, and the feeling in Russia that including it in the European Neighbourhood Policy was treating the country as an object.⁵⁵ However, even the Common Spaces were criticised by some in Russia as being devoid of content,⁵⁶ and Russia has emerged, especially since President Putin's re-election, as a more resolute and determined actor on the international scene. Averre pointed, in 2005, to the ambiguity in Russian policy towards the EU, with Putin talking about minimising the "risks and damage to the security of Russia's economic interests" of EU and

⁵¹ A Common Economic Space; a Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice, a Common Space of External Security and a Common Space on Research and Education, including cultural aspects.

⁵² Finland's EU Presidency 2006, as footnote 38; Finland's EU Presidency, as footnote 12, 3.

⁵³ Council of the European Union 2005, as footnote 11, 4.

⁵⁴ Van Elsuwege 2007, as footnote 34, 42.

⁵⁵ Averre, Derek: "Russia and the European Union". In: *European Security* 14 (2005:2), 175–202, 176–178.

⁵⁶ Danilov, Dimitry: "Russia and European security". In: Dov Lynch (ed.): *What Russia sees*. Paris 2005. (= EU Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Papers; 74), 79–97, 90.

NATO enlargement whilst building up “equal co-operation with the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation”⁵⁷. Since then, Russian policy towards the EU seems to have stressed the former aspect rather than the co-operative element. This was perhaps best demonstrated in the failed EU-Russian summit held in Germany in 2007.⁵⁸ According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies,⁵⁹ tensions with the West “were partly a by-product of domestic Russian politics”⁶⁰, though the deployment of US missile interceptors in central Europe was also seen as a breach of faith. Clearly with Putin’s centralisation of power and his reform of, and investment in, military power⁶¹ the EU faces a different Russia than that under Yeltsin, when the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement was signed between the two sides. A confident Putin has wielded the “energy weapon” in his hands – Russia’s supply of European markets with natural gas – and has noticed that Russia can do business with key states such as Germany while ignoring the feelings of the Baltic states.⁶² The danger there is that a revived ND tied too closely to the Common Spaces and the wider EU-Russian relations could rise and fall with the general temperature of that relationship. The very success, albeit limited, of the ND has been in its ability to deal with localised issues regardless of the general climate.

In sum, a key point about the next stage of the ND is that the content of the new political declaration and policy framework document was determined through negotiations between all the parties involved. This underlines in particular the important objective of transforming the ND into a common policy of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland. As such, co-ownership and equality of partners can be seen as one of the requirements

⁵⁷ Putin, cited in Averre 2005, as footnote 55, 193.

⁵⁸ “EU-Russian talks end in acrimony”. In: *BBC News*, 1 May 2007 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6668111.stm>, February 21, 2008).

⁵⁹ International Institute for Strategic Studies: *Strategic Survey 2007*. London 2007, 187.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶¹ Herspring, Dale R.: “Vladimir Putin and Military Reform in Russia”. In: *European Security* 14 (2005:1), 137–155.

⁶² Narbutiene, Neringa: “Energy supply in the context of electricity market liberalisation: the Baltic Region case”. In: Archer 2007, as footnote 34, 78–85, 81; Rumer, Eugene B.: *Russian Foreign Policy Beyond Putin*. London 2007. (= IISS, Adelphi Papers; 390), 62.

for achieving the earlier mentioned network governance⁶³ – the new ND may have the potential to achieve such a goal better than ever before. However, if it is tied too closely to the future of the Common Spaces, it may suffer in case they should fail. Furthermore, should the future ND be reduced to a regional tool of the strategic partnership between the EU and Russia, it would overemphasise its external dimension while possibly neglecting the internal one. The new guidelines for the ND only briefly mentioned issues other than those connected to the four Common Spaces at a regional level and lacks greater concreteness when referring to the entire North.⁶⁴

Conclusions

Hanna Ojanen wrote that the Northern Dimension, in its earlier form, injected new fuel into the EU's external relations, providing “a broad view on security and conflict prevention, and ‘socialisation’ as a complement to the process of enlargement”⁶⁵. That process has now been undertaken. The modest activities of the ND helped to underpin the grander scheme of enlargement with a microcosm of functional activities. Indeed, rather than being powered by high-octane fuel, the ND seemed to rest on a diet of basic but worthy Northern gruel. Ojanen also pointed to the problematic aspects of the ND: “notably involving the ‘objects’ in the making of EU policies that concern them, internal co-ordination, including between the pillars, and inter-organisational co-operation”⁶⁶. This brief overview of the most recent developments in the ND has shown that Russia, as well as Norway and Iceland, have been involved more as “subjects” rather than as mere “objects” of the ND. It shows that there is an increasing awareness of the problems of co-ordination, though there is still much to be achieved in practical terms.

⁶³ Filtenborg, Mette S. et al.: “An alternative theoretical approach to EU Foreign Policy: ‘Network Governance’ and the case of the Northern Dimension Initiative”. In: *Cooperation and Conflict* 37 (2002:4), 387–407, 403.

⁶⁴ Council of the EU 2005, as footnote 11, 4.

⁶⁵ Ojanen, Hanna: “Northern Dimension: Fuel for the EU's External relations?”. In: Idem (ed.): *The Northern Dimension: Fuel for the EU?*. Helsinki / Berlin 2001, 217–236, 233.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

From the perspective of Bordering Europe, the ND also offers some interesting insights. On the whole, the EU has tried to treat such an important state as Russia as an equal, but the make-up of the EU – with the necessity of the Commission leading on trade policy and the need to negotiate among the member states on CFSP matters – had, in fact, left little leeway for Russia in negotiations with the EU until President Putin was able to wield the “energy weapon” after the rise in oil prices from 2004. Despite what may have been the intention of many in the EU, relations between the EU and Russia have resembled “them and us”. With EU enlargement in 2004, a new boundary seemed to have been drawn, not least in Northern Europe. The Baltic states, the Nordic states and Poland were on the inside. Russia, Belarus and possibly Ukraine were on the outside. Little that has happened since then, in general EU-Russian relations, has changed this. Even the Russo-German gas pipeline has given the impression of a Russia trying to “divide and rule” the EU in a neo-realist fashion rather than an agreement based on mutual interests.

However, the ND has provided an alternative liberal institutionalist model to this rather harsh bordering. It has seen Russia treated as a participant that has engaged in a number of partnerships with the EU and EU states. There has been an emphasis on civil society and on common problems. Not least, there has been an attempt to engage Kaliningrad in the process. In other words, there has been an effort to blur the borders and to make sharp lines, such those for instance, intended by the Schengen Agreement, fuzzy.

The ND faces a choice between being effective in a few areas or trying to be comprehensive in both its functional and geographic cover. In particular, the pragmatism and hard work of the Nordic EU members suggest that an answer will be found to this dilemma. The new stage of the ND provides further opportunities for change in what has proved to be an innovative tool for EU policy. The danger for the ND lies in the connection between itself and the larger strategic EU-Russian relationship. If the ND is seen by both sides as being guarded against negative feedback from the wider relationship, then it could mean that Northern Europe would remain as a pocket of post-bordered Europe. If, however, the wider relations start to affect the ND, then a return to division in the north along fairly traditional lines can be expected.