

Gunn Marit Helgesen, NSC President
Election speech

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the support I have received towards my nomination for the position of President to the North Sea Commission. I would especially like to express a warm thanks and appreciation for all of the hard work the current secretariat in Viborg has performed throughout the previous years. Let us give an applause to Bent Hansen and the NSC secretariat: Henrik, Karen and Irene for all of their efforts and hard work to make the NSC the strong and respected organization it is today.

I am very fortunate to resume the responsibilities of the NSC after the terrific job in which Bent and his staff have performed. On the basis of your work, the NSC is a strong organization with a solid foundation in which I, as the new NSC President, am so lucky to have as a starting point to build upon.

The challenges which face us in the years to come are many. In order for us to address and successfully meet these challenges will require cooperation between our regions. A united NSC is needed to succeed further.

We all strive for growth and prosperity for our regions. We are, however, living in an era of globalisation where significant factors affect and influence our daily lives. The enlargement of the EU is such an example which will bring us many new challenges to confront. I, therefore, see the necessity to join forces and strengthen our cooperation across regional borders within Northern Europe as well as internationally.

2. Strengthening the NSC organisation:

I mentioned the significant work which Viborg Amt has so successfully contributed to the development of the secretariat. It is necessary for us to evaluate the secretariat function in respect to the new challenges which may arise. We are aware that these challenges will increasingly change as we develop. Therefore, it is necessary for us to be prepared to make continual improvements within the areas of our cooperation as well as to the organization.

Let me mention a few of the many tasks which stand before us in the years to come.

- It is vital that we continue the cooperation in the Executive Committee and strengthen political dialogue;

- We need to carry forth and further develop the work within and between the Thematic Groups and strengthen the work of the coordinators;
- Today's challenges require a trans-sectorial approach and cooperation to meet the challenges of spatial development. The thematic groups must continue to work together. A good example of this is the joint seminar on 'Sustainable Innovation' arranged in cooperation between the Economic Development Group and the Environment Group;
- We need to ensure continuity of resources (stronger participation and financial commitment) in order to further develop the thematic groups and their initiatives;
- We need to improve and develop our communication strategy and ensure transparency.

3. CPMR

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the CPMR and the work the organization has done in regards to the Convention and the 3rd Cohesion report.

As for the cooperation between the CPMR and the NSC, we have seen a positive development in recent years:

- The cooperation has been improved and strengthened. Though, we still have many challenges such as within participation, financial commitment, and the tasks which this organization will focus on. I look forward to constructive discussions on these topics.
- We have to establish concrete cooperation projects which will strengthen the network and further show the common challenges which stand before us, for ex. Safety at Sea – a theme which is an issue for all regions within the CPMR 'family'.
- Goal oriented work to strengthen our regions is crucial.
- As for the North / South dimension:
 - o It is important with an understanding of our common challenges while at the same time developing our own region's interests for the future.
 - o With respect to increased globalisation – what is Europe doing in regards to a common understanding of the challenges faced in a North / South perspective?
 - o Through my work with the CPMR, I have emphasized the importance of increased contact between the members and the North / South regions. I would like to continue this work as President of the NSC.
 - o I would also like to strengthen the cooperation with the Baltic Sea Commission.

- It is necessary to strengthen the cooperation within the CPMR in order to ascertain the views of the regions and to secure a cross-sectoral approach in policy development.
- It will be continually important to reflect the views of our 'peripheral maritime' regions in our lobbying efforts towards European institutions.

4. North Sea Region Interreg programme

The North Sea Region Interreg programme has been a success. There is all reason to give credit for this success to Ms. Lorraine George and her colleagues at the Interreg North Sea Region secretariat. The current Interreg programme concludes in 2006. I have strong reason to believe that the Interreg programme will continue. Therefore, I am very pleased that the EU Commission also suggests a strengthening of this programme. We need to ensure that the North Sea Region is secured a place in the next Interreg IV programme.

In the years ahead, I will work towards a revision of the Nor Vision advisory document which is hoped to influence spatial planning in the North Sea Region and it will be used as a strategic planning tool in the work of the Interreg IV programme.

I would like to emphasize that we need to address the consequences to the North Sea Region as a result of the enlargement of the European Union. I, therefore, wish to strengthen cooperation with other organizations in the NSR such as between the Nordic Council, BSSSC, Euromontana, and others.

We can already show positive results from such cooperation between the NSC and other NSR organizations. One example of this is the cooperation between the NSR regions at state, regional and local levels and from NGO's to stop the discharge of radioactive wastes from Sellafield. Here, we witnessed a clear victory on a major international environmental issue as a result of our joint efforts in the NSR!

This is proof that working together gives us greater strength to achieve long lasting results!

I look forward to my job as the new NSC President and the opportunity to work together with all of you in making a difference not only in the NSR, but also with the responsibility as global citizens.

I thank you kindly for your attention.