



North-South Centre of the Council of Europe



NSC/Bur (2009) 10 final
31 July 2009

Report of the meeting of the Bureau of the Executive Council

(26 June 2009, Strasbourg)

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The Bureau adopted the draft agenda as in appears in document NSC/Bur (2009) 4.

2. Information by the Chair and the Executive Director on the latest developments

Under this item, the Chair, Mrs Deborah Bergamini, and the Executive Director, Mr Denis Huber, reported orally on the recent developments and news from the North-South Centre.

The Chair reported, in particular, on her activities since taking up her duties on 1 April 2009. She began by providing information on her working visit to Lisbon on 1-2 April 2009 during which she had a series of contacts with the NSC Secretariat, the Portuguese authorities and the diplomatic community in Lisbon. The other purpose of her visit was to participate at the conference organised by the North-South Centre on the role of women, as actors of change in the Mediterranean. This was a symbolic occasion which marked the beginning of her Chairmanship and underlined her role as the first female Chair of the North-South Centre and the contribution she hoped to make in this function. She expressed her appreciation for the support shown by her country, Italy, to the North-South Centre, especially in view of the current global economic crisis and she spoke of her efforts to raise support and visibility of the Centre in her country. In this context, she would provide information on a planned initiative under item 4.ii of the agenda (20th Anniversary of the North-South Centre). Finally, she reported on her recent contacts with some of the Centre's key stakeholders. These included, in particular, the working lunch she hosted for the representatives of the member States and her bilateral meetings with some of the Permanent Representatives. She also referred to her exchange of views with the PACE Committee on Economic Affairs and Development and the Committee on Culture, Science and Education. The main objective of these exchanges was to discuss the former's report on the future of the North-South Centre being prepared in the context of the 20th Anniversary and the latter's opinion on this report (see item 4.i).

Following this, the Executive Director reported on the Centre's main activities and developments which have taken place since March 2009. One of the key developments was the completion of the necessary procedures leading to the accession of Morocco to the North-South Centre on 1 July 2009. The accession date was confirmed through a letter dated 12 May sent to the Secretary General, by the Moroccan Ambassador for European Communities.

The Executive Director expressed the hope that the other Maghreb States, Algeria and Tunisia, would follow the example of Morocco and join the Centre. In this context, he informed the Bureau members of his recent visit to Tunisia (2-4 June) where he attended the International Conference on the Dialogue of Civilizations and Cultural Diversity. He used this opportunity to have official contacts with the Tunisian authorities to present the work of the Centre and discuss the possible accession of Tunisia.

With regard to other accession prospects, the Executive Director informed the Bureau of his contacts with the Cape Verdian authorities on the occasion of his participation at the first edition of the African University on Youth and Development in Praia on 18-19 June. The Cape Verdian authorities have confirmed their strong interest in the Centre and consultations are currently underway between the relevant Ministries in order to secure a governmental position in this respect.

The Executive Director also reported on the Centre's fruitful collaboration with the Alliance of Civilisations. He referred, in particular, to his participation at the 2nd Forum of the Alliance of Civilisations (6 April, Istanbul) during which the UN High Representative Jorge Sampaio launched the initiative "Restore trust, rebuild bridges". The aim of the initiative is to overcome the trauma created by the Gaza crisis through the joint action of international organisations and major non-state players working in the Mediterranean and Middle-East region. The North-South Centre has been entrusted with the responsibility of co-ordinating the whole cluster of projects to be implemented under this initiative. Contacts have taken place with President Sampaio and will continue during the summer months to define the exact role of the Centre in this initiative. The Executive Director undertook to keep the Bureau and the NSC stakeholders in general informed of the results of these discussions.

Finally, the Executive Director gave a brief summary of his other recent activities, including his working visit to Montenegro and Serbia (8-12 May), to Luxembourg (21 April) and his participation at the inauguration event of the European Wergeland Centre (EWC) (28-29 May, Oslo). He referred to the written information on these and other activities contained in his monthly reports for the months of April and May 2009 (docs: NSC/Inf (2009) 12 and 13).

The Bureau warmly welcomed the confirmation of the accession of Morocco to the North-South Centre as from 1 July 2009 and took note of the oral reports of the Chair and the Executive Director, as well as of the written information contained in the Executive Director's monthly reports of April and May 2009 (docs: NSC/Inf (2009) 12 and 13).

3. Rules of procedure for the North-South Prize

The Executive Director presented draft guidelines for the Jury of the North-South Prize. He recalled that this followed the request of the Bureau at its meeting of 19 June 2008 under the previous Chair, Mr Claude Frey. He informed the Bureau that, in order to ensure the draft guidelines were consistent with the request of one year ago and with the practice followed in recent years, he had consulted Mr Frey on these draft guidelines. In particular, he drew the attention of the Bureau members to the fact that the practice of the Jury until this time had been not to award the Prize to individuals who were currently in office or were deceased.

Following an exchange of views, the Bureau members decided that they would like to change this practice and that, henceforth, the Prize could be awarded to individuals in office. The Bureau approved the guidelines for the Jury of the North-South Prize as they appear in document NSC/Bur (2009) 5 final. It also took note of the subsequent decision taken by the Jury to award the 2009 North-South Prize to Mr Daniel Barenboim and Mrs Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and entrusted the Chair and the Secretariat to follow this matter as appropriate.

4. 20th Anniversary of the North-South Centre

i Parliamentary Assembly Report: The future of the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (the North-South Centre)

Under this item, the Rapporteur of the PACE report on the future of the North-South Centre, Mr Kimmo Sasi (Finland), presented the preliminary draft report and draft recommendation on the future of the North-South Centre to the members of the Bureau. He recalled that he had been requested to prepare this report by his Committee in the context of the 20th Anniversary of the Centre and as a follow-up to the strategic document on the future of the North-South Centre

which was approved by the statutory bodies in spring 2008. He welcomed this timely opportunity to having an in-depth reflection regarding the mandate, composition, operation and priorities of the Centre, as well as on the future priorities and the challenges ahead.

One of the key recommendations laid out in the report was the idea to transform the Centre into an Enlarged Agreement and he underlined the positive benefits this would bring, in particular the political and budgetary impact. The Executive Director provided detailed information on the figures involved if the Centre were to become an Enlarged Agreement and he stressed the importance of gaining the support of the other CoE member States.

The Director General suggested that the Centre should promote itself to the other member States as the "privileged tool" of the Organisation for intercultural dialogue, in particular, between the Council and Europe and its neighbouring regions, and in achieving this, could justify the need of the other CoE member States to join the Centre. She felt that the Centre could follow the example of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and emphasis its role in providing a platform for debate on concepts with a more focused content to which all Council of Europe member States should have the opportunity to contribute. Referring to the recent interest shown by Russia in the Centre's work, she raised the question of the Centre's current strategic focus on the Mediterranean and southern regions and suggested that perhaps, in an attempt to gain the interest of other eastern countries, the Centre should add a more general neighbouring dimension to its geographical strategy. She also suggested that the Bureau identify someone within the member States to act as a special Ambassador for the Centre in its relations with the Committee of Ministers and help raise support for the idea of transforming the Centre into an Enlarged Agreement.

During the exchange of views, and with respect to the idea of transforming the Center into an Enlarged Agreement, the Representative of Spain agreed on the necessity of a previous sensitizing activity among the members of the Committee of Ministers. He considered important to strike a balance between the promotion of accession of new member States to the Centre, which Spain supports, and the maintenance of its current geographical strategy in the Mediterranean and Africa and that to dilute or mix this would risk weakening the added value of the Centre. The Chair also welcomed the proposed idea of a NSC Ambassador and agreed with the Representative of Spain's comments that the Centre's Mediterranean and southern focus was one of its key strengths. The President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe welcomed the positive budgetary consequences that would be offered by the transformation of the Centre into an Enlarged Agreement.

The Executive Director thanked the Bureau members for their useful suggestions and comments. He also welcomed the suggestion regarding a NSC Ambassador. With regard to the Centre's geographical scope, he recalled the double identity of the North-South Centre which, on the one hand, contributes to the political priorities of the Council of Europe's 47 member States as a whole and, on the other hand, has its own additional priorities specific to its member States only. He underlined the importance of asking for a formal opinion on the draft recommendation from the Centre's other stakeholders, both within the CoE (Conference of INGOs, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe) and in the EU framework (the European Commission, the European Parliament and possibly the Committee of Regions). This would add political strength and legitimacy to the process and therefore help the Committee of Ministers with its debate and decision.

In conclusion of this agenda item, the Bureau endorsed the proposals contained in the draft report and draft recommendation and agreed to send any eventual comments or suggested changes to the Secretariat by the end of July.

ii Other preparations

The Executive Director recalled that, at its meeting of 30 January, the Bureau had held a preliminary discussion on the proposed ideas for the NSC's 20th anniversary which will be celebrated between November 2009 (20th anniversary of the creation of the Centre by decision of the Committee of Ministers in Strasbourg) and May 2010 (20th anniversary of the setting up of the Centre in Lisbon) and that, on this occasion, the Bureau had expressed the general feeling that the 20th Anniversary was a great opportunity for the Centre.

Following this, the Executive Council had discussed the Secretariat's proposals as contained in document NSC/EC (2009) 3, at its meeting of 17 March. It:

- welcomed the prospect and timetable of Mr Sasi's report on the future of the North-South Centre, while entrusting the Chair and Executive Director to continue the dialogue with the Rapporteur and the Economic Committee of PACE so that the process leading to the preparation of a new statutory Resolution for the North-South Centre could make substantial progress in 2009;
- held an exchange of views on the proposed preparations for the 20th Anniversary of the North-South Centre, on the basis of document NSC/EC (2009) 3 prov;
- entrusted the Committee of Representatives of the member States and the Bureau to finalise the preparations and report back to the Executive Council at its next meeting in November 2009.

The Committee of Representatives of the member States had continued the discussion during its meeting on 17 April, and entrusted the Bureau to finalise the preparations at its meeting of 26 June 2009, taking into account the discussion held at by the Committee of Representatives. In addition, it agreed to transfer 25.000 euros from the ordinary budget to the special account as a dotation for the 20th Anniversary.

The Executive Director presented the calendar of activities foreseen during the Anniversary period as they appear in appendix one of document NSC/EC (2009) 3 prov 3. The Chair took this opportunity to inform the Bureau of her initiative to organise an event on the Council of Europe's work to combat violence against women on 9 September in Venice (Italy), to be held in the double context of the 20th Anniversary of the Centre and the 60th Anniversary of the CoE. This would include a film containing a mixture of clips provided by the 47 member States on its national advertising and efforts to promote the fight against violence towards women. The film would be shown during the Venice Film Festival and would therefore provide an opportunity of high visibility for the Centre. The Chair hoped that this collaboration with the Venice Film Festival could be continued in the coming years with a different theme or issue being highlighted each year.

With regard to the proposed celebration event, the Executive Director referred to the discussions held by the Committee of Representatives of the member States at its meeting of 17 April and to the reservations expressed by some countries regarding this event. He recalled that the idea of this event had already been launched in the strategic document on the future of the North-South

Centre, which had been endorsed by the Centre's statutory bodies in spring 2008. Nevertheless, he intended to liaise directly with the countries who had expressed doubts over the course of the summer so that this event, and the proposed funding for it, could be confirmed by the Committee of Representatives at its meeting on 2 October 2009. The Representative of Spain agreed with the idea of contacting countries that had expressed doubts, because of the importance that all member States may identify as much as possible with all the commemorative events.

The Representative of Italy, Mr Antonio Verde, emphasised the importance of the celebration event both as a visibility exercise and the opportunity it would provide to create a network of past prize winners. He also pointed out that only a few of the member States had expressed reservations at the meeting of 17 April, with the majority being in favour. The Representative of the Parliamentary Assembly also stressed the importance of having such an event and of using this opportunity to offer past prize winners the possibility of engaging in a debate on issues of global interdependence. The Executive Director welcomed this suggestion and recalled that while the planned publication would contain articles from the past prize winners on questions of global interdependence, the idea of further associating the past prize winners with the other planned events could be explored. The Director General suggested that a number of key personalities could be identified and invited to speak during the PACE plenary debate or the Committee of Ministers debate on the draft recommendation, when all Council of Europe member States would be present.

The Bureau approved the proposed preparations for the 20th Anniversary of the North-South Centre, on the basis of document NSC/EC (2009) 3 prov 4 and warmly welcomed the Chair's initiative and the visibility this would offer the North-South Centre.

5. 2009 programme of activities

Under this item, the Executive Director presented the interim activities report covering the period 1 January – 15 June 2009 as it appears in document NSC/Inf (2009) 10 prov 3. In addition to the information already provided under item 2, he gave information on the Centre's other recent activities, including those being implemented in the framework of the new EC/NSC joint programmes. He reported in particular on the Institutional follow-up meeting of the Africa-Europe Youth Summit (28-29 April, Lisbon) and the first meeting of the NSC-EC Joint Management Agreement (JMA) Advisory Steering group (28 April, Lisbon). He also provided information on the workshop, "Building a didactic manual on Mediterranean history" which the Centre organised in partnership with the Aga Khan Development Network (12-13 May, Lisbon) and the official launch of the Portuguese version of the White Paper on intercultural dialogue of the Council of Europe (21 May, Lisbon). The Representative of Spain welcomed this information, and highlighted the importance of providing information on a regular basis, as it is done, of the activities in which the NSC takes part and the added value that they imply for the Center, specially when these activities take place outside its usual geographical framework.

Also under this item, the Bureau examined the calendar of activities for the remainder of 2009 and the Executive Director provided information on the preparations underway for forthcoming activities. These included the 10th University on youth and development (13-20 September 2009, Mollina) and the annual Lisbon Forum event (13-14 November 2009, Lisbon).

The Bureau took note of the interim activities report as it appears in document NSC/Inf (2009) 10 prov 3 and of the calendar of activities for the remainder of 2009 as it appears in document

NSC/Inf (2009) 2 prov 4 and the information provided by the Secretariat on the preparation of these activities.

6. Budgetary prospects for 2010

Under this item, the Executive Director provided oral information on the budgetary prospects for 2010, taking into account the increase to the budget resulting from the accessions of Serbia, Italy and Morocco in 2009, and the effect this will have on the level of fixed contributions to be paid by the member States in 2010. He explained that, based on the current number of member States, the proposal would be to add only 50% of the contributions of these new member States to the budget total for 2010, allowing the other 50% to be redistributed among all member States, therefore reducing their contribution amounts compared to 2009.

The Director General pointed out that this was not the usual practice of other Partial Agreements who would normally increase their budgets with new member States' contributions but it was necessary for the Centre to propose this in order to show solidarity towards the member States who have supported the Centre during the previous years of difficulty. She added that the Centre would still need to be further consolidated and strengthened, in particular its human resource base. To this end, she was pleased to announce that the Secretary General had offered the secondment of a staff member (administrator, grade A2/3) paid from the Council of Europe's general budget for a six month period, commencing 1 July 2009.

The Bureau took note with satisfaction of the information provided by the Executive Director on the budgetary prospects for 2010 and welcomed the secondment offer made by the Secretary General.

7. Co-operation Agreement with the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe

Under this item, the President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, Mr Jean-Marie Heydt, presented the preliminary version of the draft co-operation agreement proposed by the Conference. He explained that this agreement is modelled on those signed between the North-South Centre and the Parliamentary Assembly (in 2005), and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (in 2008) and is aimed at further developing working relations between the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe and the North-South Centre, in particular encouraging common action on areas of joint interest. He informed the Bureau that the draft Agreement had been discussed the previous day by the Bureau and the Standing Committee of the Conference of INGOs and that several modifications/additions had been agreed. For his part, the Executive Director made some suggestions which would increase the participatory role of the Centre in the Conference's work, for example, by foreseeing an exchange of views between the Centre and the Conference on an annual basis at one of the latter's plenary sessions.

The President of the Conference of INGOs explained that the Agreement would be finalised over the summer months with a view to presenting it to the Conference's Standing Committee in September. Following this, it would be available for examination and approval by the Executive Council at its November meeting, with the official signature foreseen at the plenary session of the Conference of INGOs in January 2010. The members of the Bureau were invited to send any eventual comments/proposed changes to the President of the Conference of INGOs by the end of August.

The Bureau warmly welcomed the prospect of further developing co-operation with the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe and endorsed the preliminary version of the draft co-operation agreement as it appears in document CONF/SC(2009) AC 1 prov.

8. Chair of the Lisbon Forum

The Executive Director recalled the decision taken by the Executive Council regarding the Chair of the Lisbon Forum at its 33rd meeting (15 March 2005):

“The Chair of the Lisbon Forum should be appointed by the Executive Council, on the proposal of the Bureau, for a period of two years, renewable once.”

Following this, Mr Peter Schieder was appointed as Chair of the Lisbon Forum for 2005-2006 and then re-appointed for 2007-2008.

A new Chair should be appointed for 2009-2010, and, the Executive Director informed the Bureau that, following preliminary contacts, Mr Jorge Sampaio, UN High Representative of the Alliance of Civilisations, has confirmed that he would be willing to assume this position. The choice of Mr Sampaio as Chair of the Lisbon Forum would be most appropriate and relevant, in particular in view of the partnership between the North-South Centre and the Alliance of Civilisations for the annual Lisbon Forum event, and the Centre’s other co-operation projects with the Alliance.

The Bureau welcomed this positive development and, on behalf of the Executive Council, appointed Mr Jorge Sampaio as Chair of the Lisbon Forum for the next two years (2009-2010).

9. Opinion of the Executive Council of the North-South Centre on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1868 (2009) “Action to combat gender-based human rights violations, including abduction of women and girls”

The Executive Director recalled that on 28 April 2009, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted Recommendation 1868 (2009) on “Action to combat gender-based human rights violations, including abduction of women and girls”, on the basis of the report prepared by Mrs Papadopoulou (Greece).

Following this, at its 1057th meeting on 20 May 2009, the Committee of Ministers invited the Executive Council to make comments on this recommendation, to be taken into consideration in the draft reply the Committee of Ministers will adopt at a later stage. The deadline given by the Committee of Ministers is 15 September 2009.

The Executive Director explained that, given the deadlines involved, the Bureau should consider and adopt the draft opinion on behalf of the Executive Council, as it appears in document NSC/EC (2009) 6.

After consideration, the Bureau adopted the draft opinion as it appears in document NSC/EC (2009) 6 and entrusted the Secretariat to forward it to the Secretariat of the Committee of Ministers and to follow this matter as appropriate.

10. Any other business

There was no other business.

11. Date and place of next meeting

The Bureau agreed to hold a working dinner in Lisbon on Wednesday 11 November, the eve of the next meeting of the Executive Council

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