

**Meeting in Kiel 6. February 2013**

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren.

Vielen Dank für Ihre Einladung. Ich habe mich darauf gefreut, Sie kennenzulernen, um die Nordsee-Kommission und die Arbeit mit der North Sea Region 2020 mit Ihnen zu besprechen.

Heute ist nicht mein erstes Mal in Kiel. Die Tatsache ist, dass ich auf der Insel Langeland geboren und aufgewachsen bin. Ein natürlicher Teil meiner Kindheit war darum Ausflüge mit der Bagenkop-Kiel Fähre und viele Besuche hier in Kiel. Ich bin auch in einer Zeit aufgewachsen, wo wir in Dänemark nur einen Fernsehkanal hatten - aber drei deutsche.

Ich glaube, dass dies der Grund dafür ist, dass ich heute ein angemessenes Verständnis der deutschen Sprache habe. Leider ist mein gesprochenes Deutsch in den letzten Jahren gewissermaßen gerostet. Wenn Sie mir es gestatten, werde ich deswegen jetzt nach Vereinbarung ins Englische wechseln.

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But before I go on, please let me introduce myself further. My name is Ole B. Sørensen. I am a councillor in the North Denmark Region where I chair the Committee for Regional Development.

Moreover, I am the newly elected President of the North Sea Commission and it is in this capacity that I am here today.

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As you all know the North Sea has played an important role internationally right through the ages from the Viking era...

Hanseatic League.

And now in the European Community, where we are a part, not only economically but also historically and culturally.

The North Sea has long been the site of major European shipping routes as well as important fishing activities.

The North Sea has been - and is - a popular destination for recreation and tourism.

And has more recently developed into a rich source of energy resources including fossil fuels, wind, and early efforts in wave power.

The North Sea has always been the common bond between the countries around the sea, be it in relation to trade, fishing or tourism.

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On the basis of this long tradition for cooperation the North Sea Commission was established in 1989. Helped on its way by European structural funds, the Interreg programme.

The North Sea Commission was founded to facilitate and enhance partnerships between regions which manage the challenges and opportunities presented by the North Sea. Today the North Sea Commission represents 33 regions in 8 countries around the North Sea.

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In the North Sea Commission we seek to promote the North Sea Basin as a major economic entity within Europe, by encouraging joint development initiatives and political lobbying at European Union level.

The activities carried out by the North Sea Commission are action oriented and involve co-operation programmes, research activities, funding applications, and joint policy statements.

The overall aim is to bring positive benefits to the people of the North Sea Basin.

Simplified you could say, that the North Sea Commission has a political approach to cooperation, built around projects that are primarily funded by the Interreg North Sea Region programme.

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The North Sea Region includes a number of strong economies and is one of the most successful regions in Europe. But, although the North Sea Region is successful, it is also struggling with a number of issues and is, for example, still not doing enough to meet all of the Europe 2020 Strategy targets. In response to this, the North Sea Commission in June 2009 decided to explore the feasibility of developing a strategy for the North Sea Region supporting the implementation of the EU 2020.

It was important for the North Sea Commission that the process involved input from the different actors in the North Sea Region and we consequently carried out extensive consultation among the North Sea Commission members and regional stakeholders in 2010 and 2011. The process took a good 2 years and the final North Sea Region 2020 strategy paper was adopted on 31 October 2011.

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The aim of the strategy paper is to provide arguments for and demonstrate the added value and benefits of having a strategy for the North Sea region, by

1. Identifying challenges, opportunities and priority strategic areas
2. Suggesting concrete measures to be implemented

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The ambition of the North Sea Region 2020 is for the North Sea Region to remain, and further develop as an attractive and international area for citizens, businesses and organisations.

This includes

- a better governed region with improved cooperation and coordination at all levels.

- Better, faster and cleaner transport taking the environment, the ecosystems and the energy needs into account would, for example, be key factors.
- improved quality of living and economic development in a sustainable manner with due consideration to the consequences of climate change.

I believe we can make the most of these opportunities.

And I believe the North Sea Region has the potential to act as an engine for growth in Europe and a centre of excellence for wider EU issues such as climate change.

Furthermore, I believe that there is a need and a potential for developing existing cooperation efforts, improving policy efficiency and value for public money.

The strategy will:

- Help the North Sea Region to remain, and improve the performance as, a competitive, attractive and sustainable area of Europe – supporting the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy
- More efficiently address common, transnational challenges and exploit opportunities related to sustainable economic growth, climate, energy, accessibility and management of the maritime space.

This strategy proposal follows an intensive period of identification of needs and possible cooperation areas in the North Sea Region. The main message to date has been that existing resources can be better used. It is our aim, that a common strategy must deliver tangible improvement for the region and its people. It is paramount that the strategy receives the commitment of the North Sea Region member states. It is furthermore paramount, that there is strong involvement of regional and local authorities as well as a wide spectrum of stakeholders

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The North Sea Region 2020 strategy identifies a number of challenges and opportunities.

Based on this, The North Sea Commission has identified five priority strategic areas for the North Sea Region:

1. Managing Maritime space, including
  - a. Maritime spatial planning
  - b. Exploitation of marine resources
  - c. North Sea Stakeholder forum
2. Increasing Accessibility and Clean Transport, including
  - a. Development of multimodal corridors
  - b. Facilitate modal shifts from road to sea
  - c. Clean transport
  - d. Clean shipping
3. Tackling Climate Changes, including

- a. Climate change adaption
  - b. Renewable energy and North Sea energy grid
  - c. Low-carbon technologies
4. Attractive and Sustainable Communities, including
- a. Competiveness of sectors and enterprises (maritime and culture/tourism)
  - b. Demographic change
  - c. Development of skills and employability
5. Promoting Innovation, Excellence and Sustainability – a horizontal priority

The strategy focus is on those issues which cross borders and where there is added value to working in collaboration. The strategy outlines how we will meet the objectives of the Europe 2020 and contribute to smart, green and inclusive growth for Europe. In other words, the North Sea Region 2020 is the North Sea Commission response to the challenges of the Europe 2020 strategy and our contribution to the success of the Europe 2020.

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The new financial perspective and thereby the structural funds to develop our region will be prioritised according to the Europe 2020. It is therefore no coincidence that the North Sea Region 2020 document is aligned with the Europe 2020 strategy and supports several of its flagship initiatives. The North Sea Region 2020 strategy intends to provide a framework for policy integration and coherent development of the North Sea Region and the long term aim would be to have a macro regional strategy for the North Sea Region.

However, in the short term and more importantly, we would like to use the NRS2020 to influence the future European programming. And should we succeed in having elements of our strategy incorporated in future EU programmes, I believe that we will have achieved what we set out to do.

In regarding to this, I shall not refrain to mention, that the budgetary cuts proposed by the Council in different EU policy areas, are unacceptable as they penalise the principles in the Cohesion Policy.

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If the budgets devoted to the Cohesion Policy are reduced as much as 14 % there will be a pronounced political discourse in favour of European growth and the reduced means to implementing the Europe 2020 strategy. The budget cutting scenarios, proposed by some members states would strongly penalise the so-called more develop regions.

I would like to point out, that these regions have historically delivered solutions and been an engine for European growth. Cuts in the EU financial assistance would therefore jeopardise their contribution to sustainable growth and jobs creation. With the North Sea Region 2020 strategy, the NSC members have committed themselves to developing projects that demonstrate direct and visible benefits for the region and its people.

And I hope that a new Interreg VB programme for the North Sea together with for example the framework programme for competitiveness and innovation, Trans-European Transport Networks, Horizon 2020, EIB loans and other programmes will provide the financial platform and thematic focus to support the implementation of the North Sea Region 2020 strategy.

Because that is, what matters.

The North Sea Commission is very clear on this. The strategy must be followed up with concrete actions.

We believe, that member states, The Commission and the EU as a whole will become more aware that the North Sea Region is a region, that supplies solutions, not problems. Here all actors in the North Sea Region can make a difference – for as the saying goes: An ounce of action is heavier than a kilo of words.

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So, what is the state of the play in the North Sea Commission, and how far have we come in terms of the NSR 2020 work?

When I became president in June last year, and the Secretariat transferred to North Denmark, I launched a process intended to make the North Sea Commission more focused. Focused in relation to the strategic priorities we wish to work with.

The North Sea Commission is currently organized into 5 working groups under the ExCom. In recent years, the five groups have presented their own individual work program, but, in my opinion, these work programs have lacked a common line. An overall priority.

In October the ExCom therefore launched an evaluation of the last eight years of work. First looking at our internal structure in relation to delivering the strategy and finally looking at short and long term measures for the North Sea Commission.

In January I met with the chairs and advisors of the five groups in Aalborg and asked them to prioritize 3 measures for their particular group within the 4 overall strategic priorities. In March, the ExCom will consider a comprehensive proposal for a new work plan for the North Sea Commission.

A work plan that will operate with three levels of measures.

1. the measures that we will work with for the next year (action plan 2013-14),
2. the measures that we can and may work with
3. the measures that we have decided not to pursue for the time being

It is also my opinion that there should be a slight adjustment of the way we are organized. In addition, I think it is necessary that we strengthen our external communication and thereby visibility of the North Sea Commission. We must insist that we are a platform for networking and generating ideas for trans-national projects. But we must also strengthen our political profile and visibility as a region united by a shared sea basin.

When the North Sea Commission celebrated its 10 year anniversary all the regions around the North Sea were members of the North Sea Commission. This will unfortunately not be the case, when we celebrate our 25-year anniversary next year. I think that's a pity.

When I look at today's Europe, there is no doubt that associations of regions will play an increasingly important role. Here, we in the North Sea Commission must know our opportunity and seize it.

I'm really pleased that you have given me the opportunity to come here today to share my thoughts with you about North Sea Commission.

We are 33 member regions from 8 countries. We are very different. We have different approaches to cooperation. But we also have common interests. We all want to make our region a better place to live, work and invest in. This is what I would like to support through our work in the North Sea Commission.

Schleswig-Holstein has for several years been an active part of the North Sea Commission, and I hope very much that you will continue your participation.

With Anke Sporendonk in the ExCom and Volker Dornquast as vice-chair of the Marine Resources Group.

With these words, I would like to open up for questions and debate.

Thank you for your attention.