

# **A Europe without Divides?**

The EU-Russia Partnership and the Case of Virtual Borders.

**By Tarja Cronberg**

COPRI

Fredericiagade 18

DK-1310 Copenhagen K

Denmark

[tcronberg@copri.dk](mailto:tcronberg@copri.dk)

<http://www.copri.dk/copri/researchers/cronberg/tc.htm>

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This paper is about a partnership, the aim of which is to create a Europe without divides. A partnership where the vision is to transcend the divide between membership and non-membership and to create co-operation in trade, in stability and security, and in democracy on all levels. The paper examines the implementation of the EU-Russia partnership and its strategy not only on the rhetorical level but also in a micro-perspective seen from a border region (mostly from the EU-side), from a space where the divides whether economic, social or of any other kind are most clearly manifested. As borders manifest social conflict a study of the implementation of the partnership agreement on this micro-level will make visible not only the taken-for-granted assumptions and practices but also new and emerging divides. As a concrete case the creation of a European information society is studied. Will the partners be united in virtual space without divides? Conclusions are drawn on the nature of the partnership, the relationship between the partners and the perspective of a Europe without divides.

### A Vision

*“A stable, democratic and prosperous Russia, firmly anchored in a United Europe free of new dividing lines, is essential for lasting peace on the continent. The issues which the whole continent faces can be resolved only through ever closer co-operation between Russia and the European Union. The European Union welcomes Russia’s return to its rightful place in the European family in a spirit of friendship, co-operation, fair accommodation of interests and on the foundations of shared values enshrined in the common heritage of European civilisation”.*<sup>1</sup>

### The Asymmetrical Partners

EU and Russia are partners. This relationship is manifested in the partnership and co-operation agreement of 1994. This agreement aims to intensify the political, economic and cultural relationship between Russia and the EU. It aims to develop closer political links, fosters trade and investment development, supports the reform

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<sup>1</sup> Vision for the EU for its partnership with Russia. See, Strategy of the European Union of 4 June 1999 on Russia.

process in Russia and creates the conditions necessary for the establishment of a future trade area between the EU and Russia.

All forms of bilateral co-operation should be facilitated and restrictions for exports removed. The partnership is not only about trade, it is also about political dialog. The goal is increased institutionalised dialog at all levels as well as a common combat against threats such as drugs, money laundering and organised crime.

The partnership is further elaborated in the Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia approved in 1999. In the strategy the Union underlines its firm commitment of work with Russia at federal, regional and local levels and to support successful political and economic transformation in Russia. Russia is seen as a strategic interest of the European Union and the Union offers to reinforce this relationship based on shared democratic values and to help Russia search its European identity. One of the goals is the integration of Russia into the common European economic and social space. Another is co-operation to strengthen stability and security in Europe. The strategy sees cross-border and regional co-operation as an important instrument in achieving these goals. The Union promises support to cross-border and regional co-operation and the Northern Dimension is particularly mentioned as an arena for dialog. The most important concrete instrument is the Tacis-programme, a part of which is directed to cross-border activities (Tacis CBC).

Also Russia has confirmed this partnership relation in its response to the common strategy. Russia points out that partnership with the EU can manifest itself in joint efforts to establish an effective system of collective security in Europe on the basis of equality without dividing lines. In particular the Northern Dimension is seen as a possibility to develop economic and legal infrastructure for trade and investments. Transboundary co-operation is especially mentioned as an advantage which should be exploited with

*“a view of raising the level of the transboundary in the regional co-operation and regional development of both parties up to the standards established within the so called Euroregions”.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Russia's response to common strategy of the European Union of 4 June 1999 on Russia.

The discourse is about divides or rather about transcending divides. It is about relationships, links and future trade areas, about security and stability and about mutual confidence. Also ambivalences are taken into account

*“the ambivalent impact of the European Union’s expansion on the terms of its co-operation with Russia and on the Russian interests, to strive for achieving the best advantages of such expansion (law, customs, protectionism, civilized transit standards, etc) while preventing, eliminating or setting off possible negative consequences”.*<sup>3</sup>

The basic documents describe a number of concrete fields of activities such as finance, the nuclear sector and law enforcement. Implementation is followed by the Co-operation Council between the EU and Russia which meets annually and at EU-Russia summits every other year. For example at its 3rd meeting in Luxembourg in 2000 the Co-operation Council

*“welcomed that the entry in the force of the partnership and co-operation agreement has laid foundation for strategic partnership between the EU and Russia. Such partnership is essential for the creation of a lasting peaceful order in Europe, and will enable the European-Union and Russia to work more closely to resolve wider international issues”.*<sup>4</sup>

It also noted that the partnership allows both partners to speak candidly to each other when views diverge, as now in regard to the situation in Chechnya. The EU expressed its hope that the election of President Putin will lead to a strengthening of EU-Russia relations and re-invigorate political and economic reform in Russia.

Partnership between Europe and Russia is desirable for both partners. The discourse is about future divides and the future vision deals is a “Europe without Divides” and the “rightful place for Russia among European nations”. Not only the European Union offers

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<sup>3</sup> Russia’s response to common strategy of the European Union of 4 June 1999 on Russia.

<sup>4</sup> 3rd meeting of the Co-operation Council between the EU and Russia.

Russia its rightful place among European nations, Russia offers an increased international role for a “United Europe”.

*“Today, in the age of globalisation, a tight co-operation between Russia and the EU is capable of becoming a powerful stabilising element, which not only would widen the horizon of security and co-operation at the continent, but which could also provide United Europe with a worthy place in world politics”.*<sup>5</sup>

Russian membership in EU is not on the agenda nor economic or social integration as such. “Without divides” is interpreted in the texts as co-operation in selected fields. The partners underline somewhat different fields although trade is the main focus of both sides.

The actors constructed into this partnership are on the one hand the European-Union with its 15 members and on the other hand Russia, a continent reaching all the way to the Pacific Ocean. The only common territorial border in between the two partners is the Finnish-Russian border and, when the Baltic States enter the European Union, the borders between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and Russia. On the rest of the territory there is a border zone of countries constituting a buffer zone between the partners.

The economic divide is deep. The average income in the European Union is xx euros a year and in Russia xx.<sup>6</sup> The living conditions in Russia have been deteriorating all through the 90's given the collapse of Soviet Union and its economic system. Although, in the past years Russian economy has experienced a positive growth the gap is still considerable. The military divide is even greater. On the one hand there is the superpower of the Cold War with a legacy of a militarised economy, large-scale deployment of nuclear weapons and a history in the arms race. On the other hand there is the European Union without any military tradition, an organisation created for peace. EU's focus is on economic and social development and the ambition is rather to be an economic superpower. The actors of the partnership are thus highly asymmetrical and the future of the partnership is an open question.

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<sup>5</sup> Russian Foreign Minister . (Ivanov 2001:134).

<sup>6</sup> Statistical Information.

## The Tools: Tacis and the Northern Dimension

The partnership agreement is a forum for dialogue which takes place on many arenas such as trade discussions, international financial institutions, energy co-operation, crime prevention etc. Acknowledging that I am may be overlooking some of the most important dialogues, the analysis here will concentrate on the concrete tools the Commission has for implementation of partnership namely the Tacis programme and the policy of the Northern Dimension and their concrete application in a border area.

The Tacis Programme preceded the partnership agreement and was launched in 1991. The programme provides grant-financed technical assistance to the 13 countries of the CIS, with the aim of enhancing the transition processes in these countries. From a fairly fragmented start based on individual projects all over Russia, the Tacis Programme has evolved into a more implicit EU policy towards Russia. From 1991 to 1995 the appropriations for the Tacis Programme were of the magnitude of 400-500 million euros although the actual disbursements have been on a much lower level.<sup>7</sup> Funding is targeted mainly at the transfer of know-how with only limited funds for investments.

The latest Tacis regulation covers the years 2000 to 2006 and is based on an understanding

*“that co-operation is a reciprocal process, encouraging the move from “demand driven” to “dialog driven” programming”.*<sup>8</sup>

The program which is implemented by General Directorate (DG) External Relations is based on national programmes. Funding is allocated through national country programmes with indicative programmes for 3-4 years and an annual action programme for projects to be supported. Multi-country programmes, so-called regional programmes, are used for environmental protection, the promotion of transport networks etc. A special case of these and theme which is of particular interest here, is the Tacis Cross Border Co-operation (Tacis CBC) programme which promotes co-operation

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<sup>7</sup> Gower and Ardy, see also Timmermann & Ganzle, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> The EU relations with Russia. 3rd meeting of the Co-operation Council between the EU and Russia. Luxembourg, 10 April 2000.

between neighbours in adjacent countries. A part of this is a small projects' facility used to address specific tasks such as advise to governments or co-operation between regional authorities. All Tacis large-scale projects are subject to tendering. Organisations from the member countries (EU) are eligible to implement the projects while the role of Russian actors is to be local counterparts.

In the Tacis framework Russia is one of 13 countries included in the programme. There are no specific goals for Russia or the EU-Russia partnership. The Tacis activities in general deal with 1) institutional, legal administrative reform, 2) private sector and economic development, 3) consequences of changes in society, infra-structure networks and 4) environmental protection.

The Tacis CBC was initiated in 1996. The programme covers all present and future external borders between EU and the CIS and

*“focuses on assisting border regions to overcome their specific development problems, avoiding major economic dividing lines, ensuring the well-functioning of the borders with regard to movement of people, goods, services and capital, preventing illegal economic activities and reducing transboundary risks and pollution”.*<sup>9</sup>

Between 1996 to 2000 around 50 projects with a total value of 132.5 million euros were financed. The funding concentrated on networks (border crossings) environment and private sector economic development. Again, Russia is not included as a particular priority, but participates in the programme together with other countries located on the future external borders. The Tacis regulation's tendering practices are applied. Eligible for funding are organisations in the member (or future member) states.

While the Tacis Programme provides funding without policy, the second tool, the Northern Dimension is a EU policy instrument without funding. The Northern Dimension is, not astonishingly, about the North. The Northern Dimension, in the words of the EU,

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<sup>9</sup> Tacis Regional Co-operation: Strategic considerations 2000-2006 an indicative program 2002-2003, European Union 27 September 2001 p. 5.

*“provides the EU with an important framework for promoting regional co-operation in the North. Its aim is to provide added value through reinforced co-ordination and complementarity of EU and member states programmes and enhanced collaboration between the countries in Northern Europe. The Northern Dimension covers the following geographical areas: From Iceland to the West across the Northwest Russia, from the Norwegian, Barents and Kara Seas in the North to the Southern coast of the Baltic Sea. Non-EU countries that fall within this group are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Russian Federation, Poland, Norway and Iceland”.*<sup>10</sup>

The roots of the Northern Dimension are to be found in the Swedish and Finnish membership. With these two countries as members the EU would acquire a more northern perspective and a new set of issues. In September 1997 the Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen presented the idea.<sup>11</sup> This time the Northern Dimension was a framework for co-operative projects of an environmental, economic, social, cultural and political nature with the aim to stabilise the North of Europe by integrating the Baltic States and Russia into the Western democratic community.<sup>12</sup>

The Feira European Council (2001) endorsed a broad action plan for the Northern Dimension, a kind of a horizontal policy covering all EU policies from nuclear safety and energy to science and information society. There was to be no special funding but existing funding such as Tacis should be used to provide the Northern Dimension with a content. Security and defence were clearly excluded although arguments for soft security are in.<sup>13</sup>

The vice-president of Russia Victor Hristenko<sup>14</sup> in charge for the policy for the Russian side has criticised the Northern Dimension for not having created a mechanism by which concrete projects for the states in the Northern Dimension could be taken up. He underlines the Northern Dimension's own role, not its role as a horizontal policy in relation to other instruments of the EU such as Tacis.

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<sup>10</sup> Tacis Regional Co-operation, 27 September 2001 p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> See his letter to Commissioner Santer and speech at the Barents Co-operation Seminar.

<sup>12</sup> Browning, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Archer, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Speech at a Northern Dimension seminar in Finland Lappeenranta 21 October, 2001.



## Directions and roads: the Discourses of the North

The Northern Dimension is not only a political but also an academic construct. Researchers are actively engaged in the process creating new images and new spaces. Sergey Medvedev sees to the North at the blank space with mythological dimension,

*“a direction to which a compass needle points but never arrives; the North lacks locality, territoriality, borders and other counterments of our rational geometrical civilisations”*.<sup>15</sup>

Pertti Joenniemi sees the Northern Dimension as region building where both the traditional image of modern state systems and the European Union as a state like super-structure with clearly delineated borders are challenged. According to him there are two different constitutive logics present in the current Europe-talk. One is the more traditional sovereignty related, the other more open one not resonating with the exclusivity of sovereignty. The latter focuses on regionality as a new constitutive principle and focuses on networks deregulation and flows away from divisive borders.<sup>16</sup>

Chris Browning concludes on the same note that

*“despite its Westphalian aspirations the Northern Dimension is not likely to support the EU’s development in traditional state form. Consequently, it rather appears that the future configuration Europe will lay somewhere in the debate between an Empire Europe and Europe of the Olympic Rings”*.<sup>17</sup>

The Northern Dimension, gains its importance here not from its concrete actions or improvement in welfare but rather as a model for a new kind of region building and a post-modern political space. In Sergei Medvedev’s words the North is a post-modern solution to the East-West dilemma, its Third.

*“A shared peripherality, a co-operative psychological setup, and an experience of local networking exempt the North from the traditional*

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<sup>15</sup> Medvedev, 2001 p. 91.

<sup>16</sup> Joenniemi, 2002 pp 43-44.

<sup>17</sup> Browning, 2001: p. 32.

*territorial discourses based on power, history and identity, and place it into a deterritorialized post-national paradigm in which spaces are increasingly imagined and communicated”.*<sup>18</sup>

For Russia the Northern Dimension is not an imagined post-national space. Russian voices do not stress the mythological importance on the North nor the need to create new kinds of region building projects challenging the state. Russia is consolidating its own state building and is interested in concrete projects, pipelines, roads, and infrastructure, in short in financial flows.

In one of the few (maybe the only) books written in Russia on the Northern dimension Valery Shlyamin, places the Northern Dimension in a Russian context. Focus is on globalisation, economic development and the integration of the North West Russia into the world economy and global relations. His analysis moves from one regional level to another but none of these imagine a region building challenging the Westphalian state. Focus is an economic integration and co-operation (for example the transport sector is analysed in detail). The author, refers to the criticism of the Northern Dimension in Russia due to the lack of accommodation in the Feira action plan of Russian interests. The lack of concrete projects and implementation mechanisms is underlined.<sup>19</sup>

The Russian academic community has also raised the security question on the Northern Dimension agenda. Russia's Institute for Strategic Studies refers to the Russian Foreign Ministry and independent Russian experts, who consider that the Northern Dimension should be seen as an attempt to “create a new, time-timing security system based on mutual gain and multilateral co-operations”.<sup>20</sup>

The Northern Dimension is thus an imagined empty space. Russia fills it with expectations related to economic integration of North West Russia, to concrete materially established project priorities and to even a well-functioning security system. For the EU the Northern Dimension is a horizontal policy serving the interests of its Northern most members and an instrument for its strategy for Russia. Both of

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<sup>18</sup> Medvedev 2001:pp 98-99.

<sup>19</sup> Shlyamin 2002:140.

<sup>20</sup> Reflections on Northern Security Policy, 2000 p. xx.

these may be contrasted with the view of the Northern Dimension as a post-modern challenge to the modern state.

### A Pilot for Partnership

Borders constitute concrete divides between state-formations even for partnership relations. The exchange of goods, services, capital and people finds its most concrete expressions at the borders as increased interaction and new practices of control. I shall on this part of the paper explore the “true” nature of the EU-Russian partnership by looking at the borderlands between Russia and EU, the Finnish-Russian border. The task is to see how the partnership is reflected in the flows at borders, whether borders are becoming blurred in an effort to achieve a “Europe without divides”. As a former Executive Director of the Regional Council of North Karelia, my starting point is Euregio Karelia, the construction of a concrete arena for cross-border co-operation and local practices.

The Euregios, or Euroregions, are regional, territorial, cross-border formations now existing on most European borders. Covering a particular region on both sides of the border the Euregios promote co-operation in economic, social and cultural fields and create “new neighbours”. The healing of the scars of wars has been the concrete starting point particularly for the first Euregio created already 30 years ago on the Dutch-German border.

Euroregions are based on the regions- or rather the regional authorities - willingness to co-operate. Co-operation is based on national laws. Agreements across the border express regional “foreign policy” agreements. The European Union has on its internal borders actively supported this co-operation through Interreg funding, an EU-programme to promote cross-border co-operation giving room for hundreds of common activities in border areas ranging from building bridges to cross-border Christmas Parties.<sup>21</sup> In other words these kinds of open spaces reflect the changes in the states’ interests and enforcement of clear divides. The European Association of Border Regions (AEBR) is an interest organisation lobbying for the border areas and their interests. The organisation

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<sup>21</sup> Community initiative Interreg II 1994-1999. An initial evaluation. January.2000. European Union.

gives practical guidance on how to establish Euroregions.<sup>22</sup> Also on the EU to-be internal borders Euregios abound. Here common activities are made possible on the one side by the Interreg funding and on the other side by the so-called Phare CBC<sup>23</sup> funding.

Euregio Karelia was the first cross-border regional formation on the EU-external border. On the Finnish side it covers three regions (North Karelia, Northern Ostrobothnia and Kainuu), on the Russian side the actor is the Autonomous Republic of Karelia. Given the territorial definition of the Northern Dimension Euregio Karelia is in the middle of this political space. On the micro-level it should therefore reflect the intentions built into the policy of the Northern Dimension and the EU-Russia partnership.

The history of this space is both one of co-operation, wars and of closures. During the 1600 and 1700s when this was the borderland between Sweden and Russia there was in fact, no border. People moved freely across the space hunting and trading furs and fish. People crossed the border in search for a job or to find a spouse with the same religion.<sup>24</sup> Later in 1809 when Finland became a Grand Duchy attached to Russia interaction across the border (this time there was no border) flourished. Travelling salesmen<sup>25</sup> exchanged not only furs, agricultural products and textiles but also news and culture. A state boundary was first institutionalised after the Russian Revolution. Not only the creation of the Soviet Union but also the newly formed Finnish State had to secure its borders and manifest sovereignty as border regions played an important role in the construction of a new nation. The boundary<sup>26</sup> was closed for some 70 years and opened only temporarily for co-operative projects between the Finnish and Russian states such as the building of Kostamus, a mining city on the other side on the Russian side of the border.

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<sup>22</sup> Practical Guide to Cross-border Co-operation AEBR. European Commission. Guide 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Phare CBC is a programme focusing on the Central and Eastern European Countries and is an important pre-accession instrument for EU.

<sup>24</sup> Paasi, 1996: 196.

<sup>25</sup> Bazegski, 1999:8.

<sup>26</sup> Here the Finnish-Russian border of the Euregio Karelia region (ca. 700 km). There was an open international border-crossing to the Soviet Union in the South of Finland.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the entry of Finland into European Union created preconditions for the creation of Euregio Karelia. At the beginning of 1990's local, later international border crossings were opened. Local co-operative fora were created across the border and number of grass roots activities emerged. The EU Interreg II Karelia Programme (1995-1999) created the basis for a project economy which focused on the development of the border area and the cross-border interaction. However, with some divides built into it.

### The Inside/Outside of Bureaucracy

Co-operation on the border should include activities on both sides. Development of a tourist project on the river running in the Euregio Karelia area from the Finnish to the Russian side should, of course, integrate the development of building of facilities on both sides. Facilitating every day border crossing through longer opening hours should involve border stations both on the Finnish and the Russian side. Activities for the prevention of alcohol misuse among youth on the border areas should also involve health care authorities on both sides. Joint ventures in timber trade cannot be limited to just one of the sides and the promotion of co-operation among the organisations of civil society requires activities on both sides. While this seems self-evident and common sense, its taken-for-grantedness is not built into the EU financial instruments Interreg and Tacis CBC both aimed increasing the welfare of border areas.

The Interreg Programme was designed to increase cohesion in the EU. The national and EU authorities approve the programme after which the implementation for a period covering several years, is carried out by a local management body.<sup>27</sup> On this management body the regional authorities and social partners for example Chambers of Commerce are represented together with representatives of the central government (who sometimes only have the status of observers). Financing a project combines national funds, local sources and EU funds.

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<sup>27</sup> for a discussion of these see for example: Interreg III A: Programme Management Models 29.  
July 1999. AEBR

On the EU internal borders common cross-border management committees have been established for this financing. On the external border a divide emerges. No common decision-making bodies exist. In these areas common bodies, such as the Euregio Karelia Management Committee, can at the most only make recommendations funding. Further the Interreg funds can only be used within a member country or by a member country actor (for example a Finnish entrepreneur can finance a market study on the Russian side if it is done by Finns) but does not allow any provision for paying the cost for a third country actor (for example Russian lecturers' participation in training courses, on the Finnish side).

The Tacis CBC funds are divided into two types of projects large-scale projects and small projects. The former include financing for border crossings, environment and economic activities while the small-scale projects are designed for co-operation between regional local authorities including even non-governmental associations' participation. The Tacis CBC projects of both categories are funded on a project by project basis. When a project is initiated for example in the Karelian Republic, if it is a large-scale project it goes through preparatory phase of at least a year is approved in Brussels and if approved results in an international tender after which a EU member country partner will implement the project. This process may take anything from a year to 3 to 5 years. If it is a small-scale project it is sent for approval, not to a local management body, but to a management agency and thereafter to Brussels. These organisations manage the small-scale Tacis CBC projects of behalf of the European Commission (for the Tacis CBC it is currently located in the county of West Zealand in Denmark). The process is shorter but may still take a year or two before funding is in place.

There is thus a great bureaucratic divide between the two kinds of EU cross-border financing instruments. The divide is maintained by differences in decision-making practices (local/Brussels), by the costs (who may be paid), who is eligible to receive funding and finally by the approval time. It is a miracle if a project, however small, is carried out on both sides of the border, co-ordinated in an acceptable manner.

As the Finnish chairman of the Euregio Karelia management committee (the first year 2000) I tried to work for permission to pay

for some Russian participation by Interreg funds in Interreg projects on the Finnish side. This was not possible. The arguments were differences in legal basis the type of policy (internal/external) and finally comments such as “Russians should not decide over EU-money”. The most that could be achieved was to have a Russian observer on the Interreg Karelia management committee in order to at least have an exchange of information between “partners”. The Interreg directives now allow for

*“for the cost of third country participation when the chairman of the (management) committee considers the participation of these members to be central for the effective implementation of the funding”.*<sup>28</sup>

However, no participation in actual projects is allowed even if this for the effective implementation would often be needed and sometimes be critical. The internal/external divide is thus maintained although

*“the commission will expect to see a significant degree of co-ordination between linked Interreg and Tacis CBC projects. Co-ordination should include frequent contacts between all project partners, regular meetings, and the reparation of reports which both fulfils the contract/grant letter requirements for the respective instrument and identify the added value provided by the linking of the projects”.*<sup>29</sup>

### eKarelia and the Digital Divide

The Northern Dimension is a policy without institutions or funding. It is a horizontal dimension, which should permeate all EU policies. Due to the growing political pressure for concrete results a number of projects have received in Northern Dimension stamp. This applies particular to projects within the environment such as St. Petersburg or Kaliningrad sewage treatment plants financed by investment banks in Europe under an initiative which is called The Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership. Another initiative, is the Northern eDimension. A Northern eDimension Action Plan has been approved. The document, a policy for the Northern Information Society, which reflects the EU’s political eEurope initiative, includes

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<sup>28</sup> The Official Journal of European Commission 297, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> A Guide to Bringing Interreg and Tacis Funding Together, p. 17.

priorities such as fast research networks, ICT-security, electronics skills and education, the use of IT in administration and for environmental policy.<sup>30</sup> As a local follow-up a programme for eKarelia<sup>31</sup> developed by the Euregio Karelia Management Committee reflects these intentions on the territory of Euregio Karelia.

The goals of the eKarelia is to promote a knowledge-based regional economy by creating (cross-border) virtual learning environments by promoting of a (cross-border) civil society with information society tools. This local information society programme has been approved by the Euregio Karelia Management Committee on both sides of the border.

Of all the gaps prevailing on the EU (Finnish)-Russian border the digital divide is probably the greatest. Finland, on the one hand, is the promised land of information technology and is, astonishingly, the leading country in terms of the number of mobile phones and only second to the United States in that of internet connections.<sup>32</sup> In the three Finnish regions of Euregio Karelia there is the Centre of Excellence for Finnish IT development, advanced local/regional IT-networks as well as networks for citizens.<sup>33</sup>

Russia as information society is just emerging. Only lately has a discourse in information society been evolving, although the telecommunication sector has been developing dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Recently a programme of eRussia has been approved. Furthermore, in response to the EU's Russia strategy Russia has stated that it wants to adopt an active role in developing the European Information Society and to ensure that Russia will remain an integrated part of Europe. A Europe without divides should thus also include a Europe without digital divides.

In the Karelian Republic there were in 2001 some 11000 internet utilisation agreements. The Soros Foundation has financed the setting up of a wide internet network in the Petrozavodsk State

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<sup>30</sup> The Northern eDimension. Action Plan. Draft Version.

<sup>31</sup> eKarelia-Euregio Karelian as a Cultural Information Society. Euregio Karelia.2002.

<sup>32</sup> See Finland as an Information Society. <http://www.stat.fi/tk/yr/tietoyhteiskunta>.

<sup>33</sup> These examples are described in more detail in the Annex to eKarelia – Euregio Karelia as cultural information society.



University and in the city. About 40 schools and 17 libraries have been linked to the University Information Network. The University has access to about 1000 personal computers and has an active interest, due to the sparsely populated territory of Karelia, in distance learning, in eAdministration and tele-medicine.

Tacis CBC has, as an example of the Northern Dimension's horizontal nature, allocated for 2002-2003 12 million euros for implementation of the Northern eDimension Action Plan. The Karelian Republic has been preparing a concept for eKarelia to create "virtual borders" through virtual learning environments, e-business and civic networks across the border. A potential Tacis project in competition with others is to be approved in October 2002 after which international tendering among member countries will take place. The implementing EU organisation will be selected in 2004, and a Russian partner will be included in the process. The actual project will be carried out some time 2004-2005 with the results only available maybe 2006.

DG Information Society has supported the development of a Karelian concept to be linked to corresponding experiments on the Finnish side. In this ?? information society is a board concept related to societal development in general. However, EuropeAid, the new Tacis implementation organisation takes another view. The project is not clearly within the Tacis CBC framework, the concept is seen as too broad and should be clearly related only to regional economic development in North West Russia. The final result will no doubt be that the Tacis regulations are followed in great detail, and the idea of a broader cross-border concept will be limited, if at all approved to IT-development in ??

Not only are there divides within the Commission, also the local needs are dictated in a top-down approach.

### Conscious Ambiguity or Unintended Inefficiency

If we accept the assumption that the consequence of a partnership agreement between two countries are most visible and clearly expressed as increased interaction and (maybe) economic and social integration at the borders what are the interpretations of the EU-Russian partnership? Is there a partnership?

The partnership agreement is no doubt an arena for dialog, but the deeper dynamics of the partnership are difficult to discover. There is no enthusiasm and engagement nor any political initiatives other than the Northern Dimension, a policy without institutions. There is a reluctance from both sides, although the rhetorics stress the importance of the issues at stake. According the third meeting of the Co-operation Council

*“a partnership is essential for the creation of lasting peaceful order in Europe, and will enable the European Union and Russia to work more closely to solve wider international issues”.*<sup>34</sup>

It is not easy to catch those international issues, where the partners would have made a common front. The partnership agreement clearly needs reinvigorating if it is to become a tool for stability in Europe. But maybe it is only a partnership on paper and maybe the two partners are looking for more attractive partners elsewhere. Maybe the bureaucratic ineffectiveness is just a sign of a constitutive principle designed to keep the partners apart.

Given the agreement, are we talking about a partnership among equal partners? The instruments for the partnership agreement the – Tacis programme and Northern Dimension - have been unilaterally decided upon by the EU. The Tacis regulation is approved by the member states without any influence from the partner countries. Furthermore, the EU has unilaterally taken action to postpone and reallocate Tacis financing in order to exert political pressure on Russia in the case of Chechnya. The Tacis programme itself is based on national programmes negotiated with Moscow for Russia. However, the final decision on projects rests with the member states (in a Tacis decision-making body) and the main contractors are always from the member states. The regional programmes (such as the CBC) are not based on national programmes and the priorities and implementation rests with the Commission and the member states. The neighbouring regional actors of the member countries are excluded from decision making although these on the external borders are the beneficiaries of successfully implemented projects.

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<sup>34</sup> Third meeting of the Co-operation Council between EU and Russia, Luxembourg 10 April 2000.

The creation of the Northern Dimension was a political process with involvement of many partners and could be seen as a dialog oriented approach. In the early phases of the initiative it was presented and discussed at regional seminars on Baltic Sea and the Barents Co-operation. However, outside voices have had very limited say in the conceptualisation of the Northern Dimension and its role within the EU. Russia has expressed its interest in obtaining extra funds at the same time as it has been fearful that the Northern Dimension was only a tool for the EU to exploit its natural resources.<sup>35</sup> Catellani who has studied the history of the initiative seen from the EU side concludes:

*“The partner-oriented approach where partners were supposed to be equal, and with a constructive voice never really materialised. On the contrary, what it considers place is a one-way interaction in which the EU decides what it is best for the partners. Therefore there seems little difference between the way the ND (Northern Dimension) is implemented and the rather distinct top-down approach permeating most of the EU’s policies”.*<sup>36</sup>

To be equal both parties have to contribute. In the context of the Tacis CBC Programme and the Northern Dimension Russia is contributing expectations and maybe at some later stage raw materials. On the partnership agreement level Russia is hoping for economic integration.<sup>37</sup> While building a strong state Russia is open to globalisation based on its own national interests. In this Russia sees EU as

“one of the most important partners in the field of political dialogue and in the development of trade and co-operation.”<sup>38</sup>

Russia has engaged itself in the Northern Dimension and in the implementation of the Tacis programme. Given the anti-western sentiments on the Russian political scene the lack of concrete results make those engaged in the interaction vulnerable for political

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<sup>35</sup> Expressed on a number of Northern Dimensions seminars.

<sup>36</sup> Catellani, 2002:16.

<sup>37</sup> Russia sees no alternative to the integration into the global system of economic integration (Strategiya 2000:65).

<sup>38</sup> Ivanov 2001:131.

attack, which in turn may contribute further to anti-western sentiments in Russia.

To summarise, ambiguity is built into the partnership agreement on both sides. The EU has approved a long term policy of the Northern Dimension as a symbol for co-operation but is not willing to transcend the inside/outside divide for co-operation at the borders and promote a more effective use of its own resources on both sides. Russia has high expectations for integration into the global structures and sees the EU as an important player in this respect. Russia is critical of the EU instruments but has had very few proposals of its own on how to change the situation.

### A Europe without Divides?

The signs that the EU would be an actor creating post-modern spaces challenging national borders, imagined in the discourse on the Northern Dimension are very few. On the contrary the EU is on a supranational level reproducing the behaviour of a state. The strict administrative separation between the EU external and internal policies as I have shown in this paper is in fact a sign of a sovereign divide. Bilateral agreements between a member state and Russia (for example the Finnish Near Area Co-operation agreement)<sup>39</sup> are more open and flexible. There is an impressive lack of coherence between the discourse on divides and their actual construction. The fact that a Russian representative can participate in Interreg management committees seems already to be a revolution. On the other hand, also Russia is concentrating on state-building, not on multilayered open spaces.

Maybe one should conclude with a more modest perspective. Russia is not turning to an isolationist position and accepts the need to become an actor in the global structures of trade and economy. Russia becomes a partner and given its economic situation, the terms are defined by the EU. Maybe the old Soviet joke can be transferred to the partnership context: The EU pretends it has a policy towards Russia and Russia pretends it is an active partner in this policy.

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<sup>39</sup> see for example Finland's Strategy for Co-operation in the Neighbouring Areas. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 26 May. 2000. Payment of Russian costs is possible.

While there in history has been active othering of Russia as the European other and of Europe as the other to Russian<sup>40</sup> the problems of the partnership agreement can hardly be understood in this context. Rather, the two reluctant partners, accept the fact that they share the same continent and a common goal, Europe without divides - at least on the rhetorical level. Instead of a process of making a difference, there is an atmosphere of indifference. Meanwhile the border areas are left into a Northern empty space with directions but without roads.

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<sup>40</sup> see Neumann, 1999 and 1996.

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