



Ålands fredsinstitut

The Åland Islands Peace Institute

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The Nordic Forum for Security policy 2010

The nations around the Baltic Sea are increasingly using the same language when discussing security policy, but there are still differences in what threats are perceived and confidence between countries still needs to be strengthened. Those were some of the conclusions from this year's Nordic Forum for Security Policy, which was organized in St Petersburg, Russia.

The Nordic Forum for Security gathered in 2010 under the heading Freedom, Security and Justice – Common interests in the Baltic Sea Region. The Finnish Committee for European Security (STETE) and the Swedish OSCE-network were the main organizers. Some 30 distinguished speakers held 10 minute long speeches each before an audience of about 130 people. The schedule allowed for very few questions and hardly any opportunities for discussion.

Gunnar Lassinantti, from the Olof Palme International Center and the OSCE-network in Sweden, has attended all the Nordic forums for security since the debut in the beginning of the 1990's. He summarized the forum by stating that representatives from different countries are increasingly speaking the same language when it comes to security issues. Still the preceding speakers had highlighted that differences still remain concerning how state leaders perceive security and threats to security. Among the most explicit were Mr Henrik Lax, former member of the Finnish and European Parliaments. According to him, Russia is still focusing on classical geopolitical threats that the EU has given up. Because of differing perceptions of reality countries have different goals and different means for conflict resolution. Mr Lax also pointed out that there is a mutual lack of confidence, that needs to be addressed, for example through "intense people to people contact".

Mr Lax was not the only one that highlighted the need for confidence building. Mr Sven Hirdman, former Ambassador of Sweden to Russia, asserted that diplomacy does not have to be bilateral. Unilateral decisions, for example a removal of VISA requirements without demands for similar actions from the beneficiary, can be one of the means of signalling – and possibly gaining – confidence.

Mr Rolf Ekéus, chairperson of the Swedish OSCE-network, sketched a background to the current security political situation in the Baltic Sea, emphasizing that Russia has often been excluded, and currently has got polite but hardly friendly neighbours in the west. He too pointed at the lack of confidence and was one of many that highlighted the importance of the OSCE, where Russia is a party, and not as in NATO an outsider.

Boris Pustyntsev, Chair of Citizens' Watch and member of the HR council under the President of the Russian Federation gave a background of Russian development from the inside. According to Mr Pustyntsev, *at the time of the fall of the Soviet Union the former Soviet citizen's* were not able to see any connection between law and freedom nor to take economical and political responsibility. This meant that strong leadership was necessary. However Russia is on its way to adulthood and the first generations "that has never been beaten" will increasingly demand its rights. He also pointed out that Russia has never been as integrated as it is today, and that it is in the interest of the leaders to keep up this process. In his concluding remarks Mr Gunnar Lassinantti noted that many questions that were not judged relevant in the earliest Nordic Forum have now found their way onto the agenda. As is well known, the traditional questions of "hard security" are nowadays complemented with "soft security" issues. The seminar was constructed top down, starting with more traditional considerations and eventually moving on to themes

like environmental issues, corruption, organized crime such as human trafficking and different kinds of cross boarder cooperations , among others information exchange for the coast guard.

Several speakers emphasized the importance of contacts on the grass root level, and of cross border contacts. In the last session of the forum, a number of NGO's had the occasion to tell about their activities in the field of for example the environment or social inclusion. The gender issue was not very prominent, but was mentioned by above all the Swedish speakers. The Swedish parliamentarian Tone Tingsgård gave a speech on this topic, and considered it a success that none of the male participants left the room. Questions on the theme, however, came from female participants only.

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