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Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document

1. Introduction

1. The Northern Dimension covers a broad geographic area from the European Arctic and Sub-Arctic areas to the southern shores of the Baltic Sea, including the countries in its vicinity and from North-West Russia in the east to Iceland and Greenland in the west.

2. The Northern Dimension focuses increasingly on North West Russia, the largest territory covered by this policy, with its specific challenges and opportunities for the whole Northern Dimension region.

3. The Baltic Sea, the Kaliningrad oblast with its opportunities for development given its particular geographical situation, as well as the extensive Arctic and Subarctic areas including the Barents Region, are priority areas for the Northern Dimension policy.

4. The present policy framework document is a joint achievement of the partners. The Northern Dimension partners recognize that their cooperation framework can only be driven by the spirit of partnership and based on shared confidence. The Northern Dimension policy is henceforward a common project and a common responsibility. It will help to ensure that no dividing lines are established in the North of Europe.

2. Actors

5. The Northern Dimension partners are the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation.

6. Other participants are:

1. The regional councils in the North:
 - the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC),
 - the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS),
 - the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM),
 - the Arctic Council (AC)

All four Northern regional councils, with their different memberships, identify needs for development and cooperation in their respective areas and support project implementation in different ways.

2. The International Financing Institutions active in the North, notably the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) and the World Bank (IBRD) which contribute to supporting the policy, and any other International Financing Institution that may in the future implement programmes in the area.
3. Other European Union institutions and bodies and those of the other Northern Dimension partners.

7. Other Northern Dimension actors are: the regional and sub-regional organizations and commissions in the Baltic and Barents area, the sub-national and local authorities, non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations (including notably indigenous peoples' organizations), universities and research centres, business and trade union communities, etc.

8. Belarus could be encouraged to participate in expert level cooperation in the Northern Dimension framework.

9. The Northern Dimension provides also a frame of reference for intensified transatlantic cooperation of the Northern Dimension partners in matters concerning the northern regions of the world, through the observer status of USA and Canada. Other interested countries may be invited to participate as observers.

3. Objectives

10. The Northern Dimension policy will aim at providing a common framework for the promotion of dialogue and concrete cooperation, strengthening stability, wellbeing and intensified economic cooperation, promotion of economic integration and competitiveness and sustainable development in Northern Europe.

11. The Northern Dimension policy will seek complementarity among its partners and participants. The Northern Dimension will enhance regional cooperation, improving synergies of regional organizations in the North of Europe while avoiding possible duplication and will facilitate people-to-people contacts. The Northern Dimension will maximize the use of the available human and financial resources in the region, ensuring that they are used in

the most effective way. Best practices for solving issues and addressing challenges will be established as examples to follow.

12. The Northern Dimension policy framework will focus on areas of cooperation where a regional and sub-regional emphasis brings added value. Priority will be given to result-oriented proposals, seeking support from the European Union and national financing instruments, from international and private financial institutions as well as the private sector. National and regional development programmes will be respected and promoted: any new initiatives will complement the efforts deployed by national and regional authorities in the relevant areas.

13. The Northern Dimension policy will be characterised by transparency and openness towards all its actors and will take due regard of the subsidiarity principle. It will be based on the internationally recognized principles, such as good governance, transparency and participation, sustainable development, gender equality, the rights of persons belonging to minorities, cultural diversity, social cohesion, fair working conditions and corporate social responsibility, nondiscrimination, the protection of indigenous peoples and supports the further strengthening of civil society and democratic institutions.

14. The Northern Dimension will be a regional expression of the Common Spaces EU/Russia. Russia and the European Union will make the Northern Dimension policy a cross-cutting topic and a tool where appropriate for the implementation of the road maps for the Common Spaces with full participation of Iceland and Norway in matters relevant to Northern Dimension. The Northern Dimension policy will continue to address some objectives of specific relevance in the North, i.e. its fragile environment, indigenous peoples' issues, cultural diversity, health and social well-being, etc.

15. Cross-border cooperation will be a cross-cutting theme producing added value at the sub-regional and transnational level, enhancing sustainable regional development, the involvement of civil society and people-to-people contacts keeping in mind progress made towards the objective of visa free travel as a longterm perspective between the European Union and Russia as stipulated in the St. Petersburg Summit of May 2003. Iceland and Norway associate themselves with this objective in their relations with Russia. The Northern Dimension policy will encourage municipal and regional authorities on both sides of land and sea borders to engage in concrete co-operation projects of mutual benefit.

16. The Northern Dimension policy will aim to improve the conditions for border crossing of people and goods. This will facilitate economic cooperation and people-to-people contacts.

17. The Northern Dimension policy will support cooperation also between areas in the region not immediately adjacent to each other on different sides of a national land or sea border. Consequently the Northern Dimension will support sub-national and governmental cross-border and trans-boundary cooperation as one of the instruments for promoting regional development.

18. The Northern Dimension policy will promote cooperation between urban areas in the region to create a strong urban network and a well functioning territorial structure facilitating the development of a globally competitive area.

4. Priority sectors

19. In line with paragraph 14, the following priority sectors of the Northern Dimension are agreed:

- Economic cooperation, including promotion of trade, investments, customs, SMEs, business, innovation, well-functioning labour markets, financial services, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, forestry, transport and logistics, telecommunications and information technology .
- Freedom, Security and Justice, including facilitation of people-to-people contacts, development of border management, good governance, efficiency of the judicial system and judicial cooperation in criminal and civil matters, fight against organized crime, trafficking in human beings, drugs trafficking, illegal immigration and other cross-border crime.
- External security: civil protection.
- Research, education and culture, including increased cooperation in research and education exchange programmes, youth policy, promotion of people-to-people contacts, links between cultural and economic life, visibility of regional and local cultural identity and heritage.
- Environment, nuclear safety and natural resources, including reduction of the risk of nuclear and other pollution, maritime safety, protection of the marine environment in the Baltic and Barents Seas, biodiversity, forests, fish stocks and protection of the Arctic ecosystems; cooperation in the field of water policy, climate change, environmental legislation and administrative capacity building¹.

- Social welfare and health care, including prevention of communicable diseases and life-style related diseases and promotion of cooperation between health and social services.

5. Institutional arrangements

20. Northern Dimension Ministerial meetings will take place with the participation of the four partners at Foreign Minister or equivalent level of the European Union Member States / Commission, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation. They will be held every two years at a location agreed by the partners. The partners can agree to call for an extraordinary Ministerial meeting at any time.

21. Northern Dimension Senior Officials Meetings, in a similar composition to the Ministerial level, will be held whenever necessary and at least every alternate year between Ministerial meetings.

22. Partners, observers and participants will be invited to both Ministerial and Senior Officials Meetings. Other actors may participate on the basis of a special invitation.

23. Ministerial meetings will provide policy guidance and monitoring to Northern Dimension implementation. The agendas of the meetings within the Northern Dimension framework will be prepared in full consultation between all Northern Dimension partners. Ministerial and Senior Officials Meetings may have a special theme for discussion agreed on their agenda

24. To provide continuity between the meetings referred to in paragraphs 20 and 21 a Steering Group, composed of representatives of the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation, will be established at expert level. It will meet normally three times a year at a location agreed by the partners and avoiding duplication with the Ministerial and Senior Officials meetings referred to above. Invitations for the meetings may be sent to other interested councils, organisms and organizations on the basis of agreement of all the Northern Dimension partners.

6. Project Implementation and Monitoring

25. The Northern Dimension partners favour the model of Partnerships, notably the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP), as an effective way to organise practical implementation of projects in the agreed priority sectors. Any new partnership should enjoy support from the Northern Dimension partners, be ensured appropriate funding from the start,

be self-sustainable in terms of management and supplement the efforts of national authorities as described in paragraph 12.

26. Apart from the partnerships a realistic number of themes and concrete projects in the agreed priority sectors with detailed financial and operational parameters can be approved at a meeting of Foreign Ministers or Senior Officials. They will be implemented in the Northern Dimension framework on the principles of cofinancing provided they receive support from the Northern Dimension partners. Involvement of International Financial Institutions and private funds would be most desirable.

27. The Steering Group shall keep itself informed of the implementation of agreed projects. This project monitoring will form a basis also for the reporting stipulated in paragraph 28.

7. Information tools

28. A permanent flow of information is a key element of the Northern Dimension policy. The Steering group will prepare an activity report before every Foreign Ministers' meeting.

29. Updated and harmonized information on projects implemented within the framework of the Northern Dimension will be accumulated in the Northern Dimension Information System established at the European Commission's "Relex" website on the basis of information sent by Northern Dimension partners. Other participants may provide information to be displayed under their own authority unless a partner objects. Any additional material displayed at the site and presented as a common opinion by Northern Dimension partners needs to be approved by the Steering Group.

8. Financing

30. The principle of co-financing from Northern Dimension partners, as well as from international and private financial institutions where appropriate, will be the general rule. Northern Dimension activities are implemented by various actors and financed from different sources, including the existing and future European Union financing instruments and programmes, national budgets, international regional organizations, international financial institutions, regional and local public organizations, other public bodies, such as universities, and private sources, including civil society. The Northern Dimension will pay special attention to possible problems arising from the use of different financing instruments in regional and cross-border cooperation.

9. Review

31. This Northern Dimension Policy Framework document will have a permanent nature. Nevertheless it will be subject to review as appropriate. All Northern Dimension actors should provide their assessment to the Northern Dimension Ministerial and Senior Officials Meetings in order to facilitate the reviews.

1 The work of HELCOM, Baltic 21 and the regional councils are appreciated.