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## NON-PAPER THE NORTHERN DIMENSION AFTER ENLARGEMENT

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The *Northern Dimension in the External and Cross-Border Policies of the European Union* is today a well-recognised and successful EU initiative. As set out in the June 2000 Feira Action Plan, the Northern Dimension is aimed at bringing together the totality of the EU's approach to Northern Europe, in the field of external relations, and is intended to deliver maximum benefits to the countries around the Baltic Sea by better co-ordinating the Union's policies and instruments operating in the region.

Looking forward, however, we should reflect on how the Northern Dimension can be developed and strengthened, in particular to take account of the opportunities and challenges posed by the upcoming EU enlargement. This reflection should take account of the achievements of the Northern Dimension to date, and of the new context in which it will operate in future, both in itself and in connection with the wider issue of EU relations with its eastern neighbours from 2004.

EU enlargement will present a dual challenge - responding to opportunities arising across the new borders of the Union, while avoiding new dividing lines in Europe. It will be important to establish a clear vision of how these issues can best be tackled, and to draw on this vision in setting specific objectives, goals and priorities for our future work.

### 2. ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE NORTHERN DIMENSION – 1999-2002

#### 2.1 Strengths, and challenges

An exhaustive analysis of Northern Dimension activities, achievements and constraints would go well beyond the scope the present paper. Nevertheless, it is important to reflect on the progress made since the Northern Dimension was launched in 1999, looking both at its strengths, and at the challenges which it has faced.

#### *Strengths*

- Thanks to its comprehensive, crosscutting and horizontal approach, the Northern Dimension provides the ideal framework in which to address, from an external relations perspective, the problems concerning the development of this crucial region. Since 1999, the Northern Dimension initiative has enabled us to focus greater attention on the specific problems of the region, with a resulting positive influence on the EU's agenda and activities. The Northern Dimension thus provides an essential

framework helping to enhance partnership and dialogue across the Northern Dimension area at both the national and local level, and helping us to address both the commonality and diversity of the region, from the Kola Peninsula in the Arctic North, to Kaliningrad in the south Baltic.

- The Northern Dimension has also helped greatly in promoting enhanced coherence and co-ordination among and between EU and national activities aimed at enhancing our cross-border relations. More remains to be done, but significant progress has already been made.
- The innovative character of the Northern Dimension, and its ability to promote a wide co-operation on the different issues of concern to the region, have been well reflected in the various practical initiatives carried forward under this process. While it would be invidious to single out individual activities, a special reference could nevertheless be made to work carried out to establish the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP), or the Northern e-Dimension Action Plan (NeDAP).
- The Northern Dimension has also been innovative in building an effective and constructive partnership between the EU and neighbouring countries, including of course Russia. These achievements could serve as a constructive example of how to address comparable issues arising in relation to other border regions, and may in particular serve as an example of how to promote cross-border cooperation in the context of a "Wider Europe".

### *Challenges*

- It is clear that a number of conceptual difficulties remain, for example in relation to the external / internal aspects of the Northern Dimension. These difficulties might be accentuated in a post-enlargement context, when all but three of the countries located in the Northern Dimension region will be EU Member States. It will be important to ensure that the external-relations identity of the Northern Dimension is fully expressed. Equally, we must ensure that there is no confusion between the EU's cooperation with Russia as a neighbour, under the Northern Dimension, and our broader relations with Russia as a bilateral and global partner.
- It could be argued that the balance of activities under the Northern Dimension has not always taken sufficient advantage of the opportunities offered by this innovative forum. The Northern Dimension could be an excellent example of a genuine partnership, offering opportunities for dialogue as well as for cooperation, in the political, economic, social and cultural fields. Yet too often attention has been focused on the cooperation aspect alone, resulting on a rather diverse list of specific "projects" without always giving enough emphasis to the broader dialogue on which cooperation can be based.
- The Northern Dimension necessarily covers a very wide range of themes and issues, appropriate to the comprehensive character of the initiative. Nevertheless, it could be useful to tighten the focus of the Northern Dimension - emphasising a restricted number of key themes and priorities, of high political relevance and focused on deliverable results, and concentrating on a smaller range of primary activities within each of these key themes. A more strategically-focused definition of Northern

Dimension goals and priorities would help ensure that the key priorities can in fact be given the necessary attention, and that the essential is not submerged in the important.

- A key strength of the Northern Dimension should lie in its ability to involve a very wide range of actors, whether at the national and EU level or at the regional or local level, and including the business sector and civil society. Yet too often our activities have been pursued in an excessively "top-down" manner, or it has been expected that the EC budget should be the primary source of finance for Northern Dimension activities overall. It will be important for the future strength of this initiative to encourage all actors to play their full part, in their own sectors of competence, and in line with the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity.

## **2.2 The Northern Dimension Action Plan: main achievements**

The European Commission presented at the Luxembourg Conference (9 April 2001) a full inventory of the activities which it was carrying out in each sector of the Northern Dimension Action Plan. The Action Report to be produced by end-2002 will provide an update on this, but a number of key elements can already be signalled<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Environment and Nuclear Safety***

Under the Tacis programme special attention is being paid to the environment in Northwest Russia in sectors such as water, wastewater treatment, energy efficiency, district heating, waste. The Phare programme has committed roughly €55 M between 1994 and 2000 on environmental projects in the Baltic Sea region, while the ISPA programme will make some €500m a year available to all candidate countries for environmental projects (mainly wastewater treatment systems) in the period 2000- 2006.

As for Nuclear projects, the European Union is participating in the decommissioning of the Ignalina (Lithuania) nuclear power plant, with a financial assistance that will amount to some € 165 M in the 2000-2006 period. More initiatives are being implemented in Northwest Russia, principally to solve urgent problems concerning radioactive waste disposal.

Environment and nuclear safety are the core priorities of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership Support Fund, which was launched on 9 July 2002 with a Pledging Conference held in Brussels. On that occasion, the Commission has officially announced a € 50 M pledge towards the fund, with a strong focus on nuclear-related projects.

### ***Cross-border co-operation***

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the activities summarised here do not provide a complete picture of all Northern Dimension activities. Many activities carried out by EU Member States bilaterally, or by regional bodies, directly contribute to the implementation of the Feira Action Plan. Unfortunately, the information on all these initiatives is today incomplete, and it will be important to establish a coherent information system covering all such activities, helping increase synergy and avoid duplication.

Under the Tacis Cross-Border Co-operation Programme €38 M has been allocated for technical assistance and infrastructure works at border crossings. Almost 40% of this amount has been spent on the Finnish-Russian border, with the construction of crossings at Salla-Kelloselka and Svetogorsk-Imatra being completed. Some €11.5m will be spent soon in Kaliningrad on border crossings with Lithuania and Poland.

To date, the Commission has spent more than € 40 M on projects ranging from SME and human resource development, to healthcare, energy and tourism in the Kaliningrad Oblast. This region will continue to be a primary focus for the Tacis national programme for Russia; future priorities include environment, administration and law enforcement and public health. To support the effective implementation of these projects and programmes, a new Tacis office was opened in Kaliningrad at the beginning of 2001.

In addition, the Phare and Interreg programmes have provided significant funding on the westward side of the borders with Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. Important steps have also been taken by the Commission to ensure a better co-ordination between three EU programmes (Interreg, Phare and Tacis) which can be used to implement projects under the Northern Dimension.

Finally, in close co-operation with the Council of the Baltic Sea States, a wide-ranging Northern eDimension has been developed and proposed for financing. The Tacis Cross-Border Programme will support the Northern eDimension Action Plan with some € 12 M over two years.

### ***Justice and Home Affairs***

Several activities in this sector are being carried out by the European Commission and the members of the Council of the Baltic Sea States – CBSS. The Baltic Sea States Summit, held on 3-4 May 1996 in Visby, established a Task Force on Organised Crime.

The Task Force started to work in June 1996. Joint operative measures have been carried out and judicial cooperation developed, together with structures for the exchange of information and joint surveys relevant to combating organised crime. This work is now co-ordinated in the joint Operative Committee (OPC), where representatives of all law enforcement agencies in the Baltic area meet every second month.

Russia has from the start been an active member in the Task Force, participating in projects against drugs, stolen cars and illegal migration and money laundering. Moreover, Russia has organised joint operations on car trafficking and illegal migration, including in the Kaliningrad area.

Within the framework of the EU–Russia “Partnership and Cooperation Agreement” (PCA), special attention is paid to the Kaliningrad Region. A Tacis Project on Combating Organised Crime in Kaliningrad has been prepared in order to foster cross-border co-operation in the area of Justice and Home Affairs. This project will also promote a multi-disciplinary approach, including a national inter-service co-operation between different ministries and law enforcement agencies.

## **3. OPPORTUNITIES AND OPTIONS FOR THE NORTHERN DIMENSION**

### **3.1. The Northern Dimension and EU enlargement**

The enlargement of the Union will certainly profoundly change the context of the Northern Dimension – from 2004, only Russia, Norway and Iceland would remain outside the Union. In this changed context, it is legitimate to ask what will be the added value provided by the Northern Dimension.

It is clear that EU enlargement will not deprive the Northern Dimension of its fundamental *raison d'être*, as a focus for dialogue and co-operation on issues relevant to the region as a whole, bringing Russia together with the EU Member States (both new and old) and with the other Northern partners (Norway and Iceland, both EEA members). In this context, the principal objective of a forward-looking Northern Dimension policy should be to address in particular the opportunities and challenges arising from the post-enlargement situation, with a specific reference to regional issues (as opposed to bilateral EU-Russia issues).

One specific challenge will be to intensify the mutual efforts of all partners to promote development across the border regions. It will be important to strengthen our efforts, on both sides of the borders, to stimulate trade and investment, to create productive employment, and to promote social and cultural exchange, and in this way to take full advantage of the opportunities which the increasing economic integration of the region can offer.

The enlargement of the EU will certainly accentuate the need for cooperation across the region, in order to promote the cohesion and prosperity of the region as a whole. In particular, the Northern Dimension will work to strengthen the interaction between Russia and the EU across the new EU external border (and indeed the Northern Dimension could become a model for strengthened neighbourly co-operation with other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, notably the Union's future new neighbours Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova).

### **3.2. The policy focus of the Northern Dimension**

The most important document of the Northern Dimension, the Feira Action Plan (2000-2003) covers a wide range of sectors and activities, among which the Feira European Council requested the Commission to concentrate its efforts mainly on three sectors: Environment and Nuclear Safety, Cross-Border Co-operation, Justice and Home affairs<sup>2</sup>. From the Commission's viewpoint, these three sectors will remain of crucial importance in a post-enlargement perspective, and will continue to be the primary focus of the Commission's work in relation to the Northern Dimension.

In the other areas of work covered by the Action Plan (energy and infrastructures, public health, trade and business cooperation, education and research), it will be important for other partners to take a more active lead. The future Northern Dimension will have to rely, more than today, on a mechanism open to contributions from different partners, each

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<sup>2</sup> "The European Council endorsed the Action Plan for the Northern Dimension with external and cross-border policies of the European Union 2000-2003 as an important step towards implementing the Guidelines adopted in Cologne. It invited the Commission to take a leading role in implementing the Action Plan and to present appropriate follow-up proposals, including on the environment and nuclear safety, the fight against international crime and Kaliningrad [...]", Official Conclusions, Feira European Council (19-20 June 2000).

being responsible for the implementation of selected parts of the new Action Plan. The principle of subsidiarity should find a more extensive application in the Northern Dimension, involving in a more structured way local governments, regional authorities, the business world and civil society.

It will be important also to have a coherent system to exchange information between the various actors on relevant activities underway or planned. Such a system could significantly increase the effectiveness of our activities, helping avoid duplication and allowing synergies among the different actors and initiatives on the ground. The use of virtual tools as a medium for this dialogue could be explored.

In this context the co-operation between and among the Commission and regional bodies such as the CBSS, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers will be a very important feature of the future Northern Dimension, as already highlighted by the Conclusions of the Luxembourg Conference and the *Full Report on the Northern Dimension* endorsed by the Gothenburg European Council. The Commission and these bodies must continue their co-operation with a view to achieving two major objectives. First of all, to intensify and structure the policy dialogue on issues of common interest and concern; secondly, to reinforce our cooperation on the implementation of concrete activities.

Further, the core activities of the Northern Dimension must not be seen as being limited to concrete projects, but should include also a policy dialogue with all the partners concerned. This dialogue should primarily deal, in a post-enlargement perspective, with the consequences of this process on EU-Russia regional relations and with the opportunities and challenges arising from enlargement. It should also be expanded to include a wider range of actors; not only national governments, but also local and regional authorities, civil society, business organisations, and the scientific community.

For example, realising that the major part of the financing for development of the region will have to come from private sources, attention should be given to mobilising the private business sector, including the financial sector, to meet the objectives of the Northern Dimension. The Northern Dimension Business Forum already mentioned in the Full Report to the Gothenburg European Council should be used for dialogue with the private sector. Their advice and practical suggestions should be sought on ways to improve framework conditions which will promote trade and investment and socio-economic development across the new external EU border.

Equally, the new Action Plan should make full use of the considerable scientific and technological potential in the region, to help identify solutions to the specific problems arising in the Northern Dimension area.

### **3.3. A post-2003 Action Plan for the Northern Dimension.**

The present Action Plan for the Northern Dimension runs through 2003. Its successor would therefore logically enter into force as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004. This will coincide with the likely date of EU enlargement, and will in addition allow the full year of 2003 to be used both to complete as much as possible of the actions foreseen under the first Action Plan, and to prepare its successor. To permit a smooth adoption of the new Action Plan, during the first half of 2003, it will of course be necessary to lay its foundations, and establish clear guidelines for a new Action Plan, during the Danish Presidency in 2002.

The next few months up to a high-level conference in October should be used for consultations for fleshing out in greater detail the priorities, guidelines and mechanisms of the new action plan.

It will also be important to make a substantive review of the achievements and constraints of the first Action Plan (the Action Report which the Commission will present before the end of 2002 will contribute to this). One concern which has often been expressed is that the present Action Plan is too project-oriented, providing a catalogue of individual projects, but not giving sufficient focus on underlying objectives and priorities. A new Action Plan would usefully concentrate more on setting out clear objectives, goals and priorities within each of the key themes covered by the Northern Dimension, as well as providing an indication of the mechanisms for coordination between all partners concerned, and of appropriate monitoring and review arrangements.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

The Northern Dimension initiative has experienced a period of strong and rapid growth since its birth in 1999. Now, and following on EU enlargement, the Northern Dimension will have an even more critical role to play. This calls for a certain reshaping of objectives, priorities and activities to help ensure that the Northern Dimension can play its full part in maintaining and strengthening our partnerships across the region in the years to come.

This reshaping of the Northern Dimension should be fully reflected in the new Action Plan which will be adopted in 2003 and take effect with enlargement. The primary aim of this document will be to set out clearly the strategic objectives, goals and priorities of the Northern Dimension in our external relations post-enlargement, defining at the same time suitable mechanisms to monitor progress.

In strengthening the Northern Dimension in this way, we must also work to emphasise dialogue as well as cooperation, to focus more tightly on key priorities, and to ensure a full participation and synergy among all actors involved. In this way, the Northern Dimension will make an essential contribution to ensuring that the opportunities and challenges posed by enlargement will be addressed to the benefit of all, and can serve as a model for the EU's relations with its neighbours in the Wider Europe.

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