

Fifth Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum

Conference Statement

22 November 2017

Members of the European Parliament, the Icelandic *Althingi*, the Norwegian *Stortinget*, the *State Duma* and the *Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation*, met in Brussels on 22 November 2017 with the presence, *inter alia*, of regional inter-parliamentary organizations, governmental institutions and councils of the North, at the Fifth Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum to discuss the development and progress of the Northern Dimension Policy in the Baltic Sea Region and in the European Arctic and Sub-Arctic areas, including the Barents Region, and to coordinate the policies of the parliamentary bodies within the Northern Dimension area.

The Fifth Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum:

1. Acknowledges the important role of the Northern Dimension policy, covering a broad geographical area of an increasing geopolitical relevance and having an impact through practical regional cooperation in sustainable development, public health and social well-being, culture, environmental protection, logistics, connectivity and transport;
2. Emphasises the importance and value of parliamentarians from the European Union, Iceland, Norway, Russia and regions, meeting and discussing issues of common concern for the North, in presence, *inter alia*, of regional inter-parliamentary and governmental institutions and councils; Reminds that at the outset, the Forum was intended as a recurrent place for exchange of views between representatives of the Northern Dimension partners and of the different parliamentary bodies in the North;
3. Recognizes the enduring relevance and suitability of the main Northern Dimension characteristic, i.e. the shared ownership of this policy by the four partners: the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation, on the basis of good neighbourliness, equal partnership, common responsibility and transparency;
4. Underlines that the Northern Dimension policy serves as a successful model of stability and engagement in cooperation; Highlights also the ongoing constructive and pragmatic cross-border cooperation within the Northern Dimension area and its partnerships;
5. Stresses the importance of meetings on a political level and encourages the ministers in the Northern Dimension cooperation to meet and give new direction to the cooperation;

6. Reminds that the overall aim of the Northern Dimension policy is to provide a common framework for the promotion of dialogue and concrete cooperation, strengthening stability, health and well-being and intensified economic cooperation, promotion of economic integration and competitiveness and sustainable development for the benefit of all people living in Northern Europe, including the indigenous peoples; Acknowledges that sustainable harvest of living marine resources is important for the inhabitants of the Northern Dimension Region;
7. Takes note of the work of the four regional councils in the North - the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Arctic Council and welcomes their continuing efforts on cross-border and people-to-people cooperation; Calls to maintain close collaboration between them, and between the Councils of the North and their parliamentary conferences.
8. Underlines in particular, the need to have a close interaction between the Northern Dimension policy and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea and the Russia Strategy of social and economic development of the North-West federal district; Also underlines the need to have a close interaction between the Northern Dimension policy and the relevant Arctic policy strategies of the EU, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation;
9. Calls on Northern Dimension partners to do their utmost to maintain stability and peace and to improve international relations in the region; Stresses that security challenges of strategic importance to the partners should be addressed along a spirit of continued engagement and dialogue;
10. Recognises the importance of continuous and sufficient funding for cross-border cooperation and people-to-people programmes across the entire Northern Dimension area, and in particular to the northern sparsely populated areas, in order to tackle disadvantages, such as harsh climate conditions and long distances; Emphasises the importance of further development of various programmes of bilateral and multilateral cross-border cooperation programmes in the region;
11. Underlines the importance of proactively engaging and financing the Northern Dimension sectorial Partnerships, their financial instruments, projects and initiatives to find ways of meaningfully developing their activities; Encourages the Northern Dimension partners to stay focused on issues of specific relevance in the North, such as its environment, public health, social and gender issues, transport and connectivity, cultural including indigenous peoples issues, academic research, academic cooperation and academic exchanges through the Northern Dimension Institute as well as links to the private sector with assistance of the Northern Dimension Business Council;
12. Highlights the role of fluent transport, communication and electricity networks; Reminds, that better connectivity of the rural areas of the North is a prerequisite for their sustainable and competitive economic development; Calls for an innovative approach to connectivity across the region, making full use of the possibilities offered by advances in telemedicine, distance education and other means of employing communications technology;
13. Welcomes the work of the Northern Dimension Partnership for Transport and Logistics (NDPTL) with the aim to facilitate improvements of transport connections and logistics supporting

international trade and people-to-people contacts with respect to the vulnerable Northern environment, thus stimulating sustainable economic growth in the Northern Dimension region; Underlines the need of investment in transport logistic and infrastructure links, such as road, rail, ports and flight connections as well as of ensuring connectivity in the whole Northern Dimension area; Emphasizes the need for forward-looking approaches within the NDPTL, particularly with respect to autonomous systems, increasing traffic safety in all modes, and transportation modes without carbon emissions;

14. Stresses the importance of good physical connectivity and accessibility of the Northern Dimension area to the TEN-T network and the Joint Barents Transport Plan, its planned core network corridor extension of the North Sea-Baltic and Scandinavian-Mediterranean corridors, as well as second level access routes as the key transport structure to enable sustainable mobility of people and goods; Encourages also exploring connectivity to and within the Arctic, including developing ports, air and rail links, with the view of completing the rail link between the Arctic and the Mediterranean;
15. Highlights the need to improve telecommunications in the Arctic to strengthen the security for the people and the safety for the environment;
16. Calls to address efficiently the urgent environmental challenges of the Baltic Sea, in this respect welcomes the actions of HELCOM to improve the Baltic Sea's health; Recognizes and encourages the success of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership in implementing projects in north-west Russia (particularly those of St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad) and Belarus for wastewater treatment, in full compliance with HELCOM standards; Recognizes as well the complex work carried out by the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership to tackle the risks caused by radioactive waste. Calls on all Baltic Sea States and the EU to take prevention measures and immediate actions to improve the quality of their waste-water effluents and halt untreated discharges without delay and to show determination to clean up the heavily polluted sea; Calls to take urgent action on the worrying levels of plastics and micro-plastics in the seas;
17. Welcomes the entry into force of the Paris Agreement on 4 November 2016; supports ratification and swift and effective implementation by all its Parties; Underlines that emission reduction measures by the Northern Dimension partners will play a great role in tackling climate change in the Arctic; Encourages the increased use of renewable energy sources and measures to increase energy efficiency;
18. Highlights that more scientific knowledge is needed about the consequences of climate change for society and people, preparedness and capabilities to adapt to change and mitigate it; Science, therefore, should be the underlying basis for policy-making when it comes to environmental protection and the fight against climate change;
19. Recommends that gender based analyses are used in the development, implementation and assessment of relevant policies in the region, as part of creating preconditions for health and social wellbeing.
20. Points out that the climate change is advancing at a double – and accelerating – pace in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions – and causing dangerous and unpredictable changes to world ecosystems

and residents of these areas, including indigenous peoples; In the Northern Dimension area particularly, black carbon pollution has a strong impact on Arctic sea ice and should thus be urgently addressed also within the context of the Northern Dimension Policy, using the existing policies to this effect;

21. Draws attention to the potential future increases in traffic volumes in the North, calling for increasing cooperation between coast guards, ensuring that sufficient search and rescue capabilities, and the necessary infrastructure are in place in time to tackle increases in maritime activity and tourism, which will also be likely to have an impact on all the Northern Dimension partners and the populations of the Northern Dimension region;
22. Draws attention to the links between sustainable development, the need for environmental protection and health and social well-being of the populations of the Northern Dimension area; takes note of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) Strategy 2020 and the Action Plan accompanying this Strategy, and encourages partners to ensure the necessary policies, funds and commitment. Acknowledges that the emergence of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is an increasing health threat that affects all the Northern Dimension Partners and calls for continued efforts in combating AMR as a multi-sectorial problem, encompassing human and animal health, agriculture and the environment;
23. Welcomes the efforts of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC), with the aim of providing a platform for exchange of best practices, dialogue and meetings with stakeholders representing government (national, regional, local) and the private sector as well as different sectors of cultural life (state and non-state), facilitating a dialogue between cultural actors and the business community in order to seek areas of mutually beneficial cooperation and the development of the creative economy, promoting cooperation in the field of culture between the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) and the Arctic Council (AC), with a view to fostering synergies and avoiding overlap; providing a point of information allowing relevant actors to keep each other continuously informed of their plans and activities. Welcomes the establishment of a permanent secretariat for the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture as an important step in strengthening the partnership and its work on cultural exchange and creative industries;
24. Underlines the rich cultural and linguistic heritage of the Northern Dimension area and encourages further cross-border cooperation and people-to-people contacts through exchanges in the fields of culture and education; draws attention to the Sustainable Development Goals, which include *inter alia* ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for indigenous peoples, also in their own languages; Encourages cooperation in the field of culture between the various forums in the region, such as the annual forum of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture in Saint Petersburg, as well as creating links to the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 to acknowledge the strong cultural links reaching from the Northern Dimension area to the Mediterranean;
25. Calls on the President of the European Parliament to forward this Statement to the parliaments and to the governments of Iceland, Norway and Russia, to the other institutions of the European Union and to the national parliaments of the European Union;
26. Welcomes with gratitude the kind invitation of the Norwegian Parliament to host the Sixth Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum in 2019.