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Introduction

The Northern Dimension in the external and cross-border policies of the European Union reflects the EU's relations with Russia (and particularly North-west Russia) in the Baltic Sea region and Arctic Sea region. The Northern Dimension addresses the specific challenges and opportunities arising in those regions and aims to strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the EU and its member states, the northern countries associated with the EU under the EEA (Norway and Iceland) and the Russian Federation. The Northern Dimension is implemented within the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia. A particular emphasis is placed on subsidiarity, and on ensuring the active participation of all stakeholders in the North, including regional organizations, local and regional authorities, the academic and business communities, and civil society.

Several key priority themes for dialogue and cooperation under the Northern Dimension have been identified, including

- economy, business and infrastructure

- human resources, education, culture, scientific research and health

- the environment, nuclear safety, and natural resources

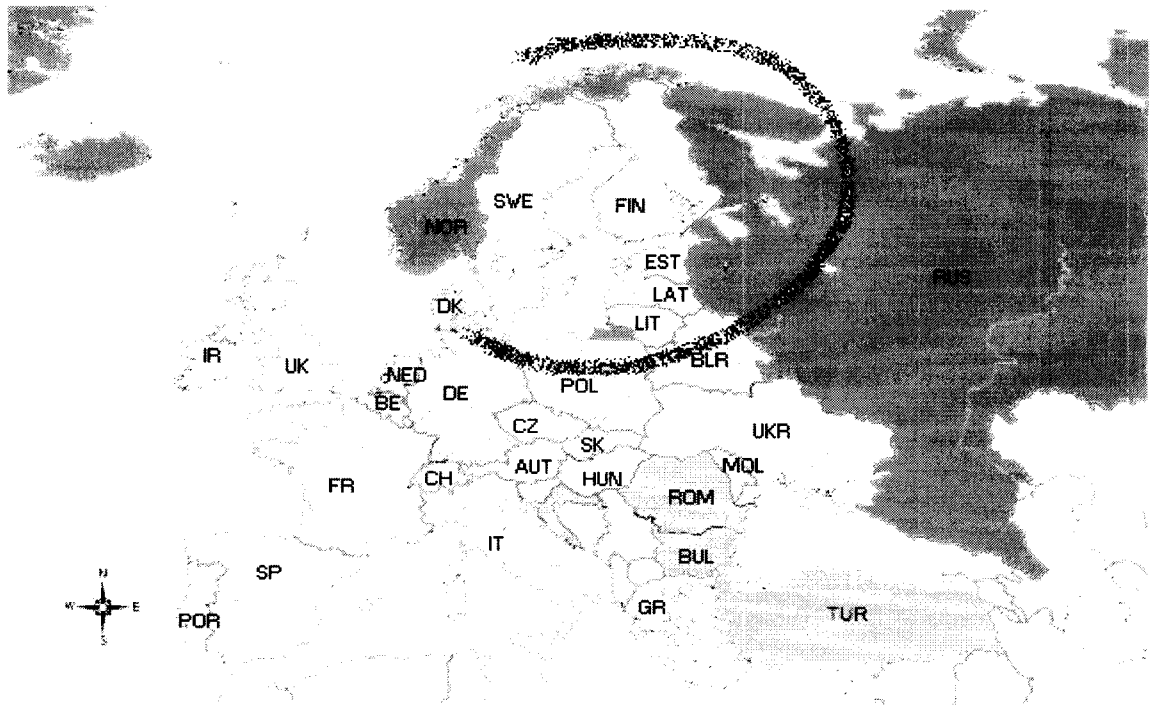
- cross-border cooperation and regional development

- justice and home affairs

The Northern Dimension also pays special attention to regions with specific needs, such as Kaliningrad and the Arctic region. Furthermore, the Kaliningrad oblast of Russia and the Arctic area are the two Northern Dimension cross-cutting fields.

The Northern Dimension operates through the efforts of all stakeholders. Where financial support at the EU level is required, the Northern Dimension draws on existing EU financial instruments, notably Tacis and Interreg, aiming to use these instruments for projects which provide significant added value.

The Northern Dimension geographical area



The Northern Dimension concept covers a broad and diverse geographic area, stretching from the Arctic and sub-Arctic to the southern shores of the Baltic, and from North-West Russia in the East to Iceland and Greenland in the West.

Objectives

The Northern Dimension aims at addressing the special regional development challenges of northern Europe. These include harsh climatic conditions, long distances, wide disparities in standards-of-living, environmental challenges including problems with nuclear waste and waste water management, and insufficient transport and border crossing facilities. The Northern Dimension is also intended to take advantage of the rich potential of the region, for example in terms of natural resources, economic dynamism, and a rich cultural heritage.

The Northern Dimension is intended to promote security and stability in the region, as well as helping build a safe, clean and accessible environment for all people in the north. The Northern Dimension also has the objectives of addressing the challenges arising from uneven regional development, and helping avoid the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe following EU enlargement.

With the enlargement of the Union on 1 May 2004 to include Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, the importance of the Northern Dimension has increased considerably : eight EU Member States (Denmark, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Sweden) surround the Baltic Sea, and the EU's shared border with Russia has lengthened significantly.

History

Recent years have seen far-reaching changes in the geopolitical map of northern Europe. The Baltic States regained their independence in 1991. Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995, and Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in 2004. These events greatly increased the Northern and Baltic "presence" of the EU, and substantially lengthened the common border shared by the EU and the Russian Federation. It was imperative to address constructively the new challenges and opportunities which these changes have created.

The Northern Dimension as an important topic for EU policy was first recognised at the Luxembourg European Council in December 1997. In the years which followed, the concept became more concrete. The Vienna European Council in December 1998 adopted a Commission Communication on a *'Northern Dimension for the policies of the Union'*. Six months later, in Cologne, the European Council adopted *Guidelines for the implementation of the Northern Dimension*. In November 1999, the Finnish EU Presidency held a Ministerial Conference on the Northern Dimension, where an *Inventory of current activities under the Northern Dimension* was adopted. The Helsinki European Council in December 1999 invited the Commission to prepare a Northern Dimension Action Plan, and the Feira European Council in June 2000 subsequently adopted this first *'Action Plan for the Northern Dimension in the*

external and cross-border policies of the European Union, 2001-2003'. All these documents, and other key documents adopted subsequently) are available under : Documents.

In April 2001 the Swedish EU Presidency and the European Commission organised the 2nd Ministerial Conference on the Northern Dimension in Luxembourg. In June 2001, the Gothenburg European Council endorsed a *Full Report on Northern Dimension Policies* that, while taking stock of the activities undertaken to implement the Feira Action Plan, also outlined ideas and proposals for the continuation of the Northern Dimension initiative.

A ministerial meeting in Illulisaat, Greenland in August 2002 discussed possible guidelines for a Second Northern Dimension Action Plan, which were adopted at a ministerial meeting in Luxembourg in October 2002. Following this, the Commission proposed the 2nd NDAP in June of 2003, and this was adopted at the European Council in Brussels in October 2003. This 2nd NDAP covers the period 2004-2006.

As foreseen under the 2nd NDAP, progress in implementing the Action Plan will be reviewed by meetings of Senior Officials and of Ministers held in alternate years. The first such Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) was held in Brussels in October 2004, and the Ministerial Meeting will be held in the autumn of 2005.

Annual reports on NDAP implementation are produced by the European Commission (the most recent in December 2003); the next will be produced in spring 2005. In addition, the Commission has since summer of 2004 hosted on its website a comprehensive Northern Dimension Information System, presenting in an easily accessible format information on a wide range of Northern Dimension activities being carried forward by all Northern Dimension partners.

Administrative framework and financing instruments

The Northern Dimension is a common undertaking of the European Communities and the EU Member States together with partner countries. As an EU-led initiative, in which the Commission plays an overall leading role, its success nevertheless depends on the active participation of all actors involved, whether at the national, regional or local level, among the business community, or among civil society generally. The NDAP provides a clear framework for all stakeholders, setting out strategic objectives, priorities and concrete activities. These activities shall be carried forward in a cooperative spirit based on inclusive participation, subsidiarity and complementarity, with an effective division of labour and overall coordination and monitoring.

The Northern Dimension provides a common framework for the promotion of policy dialogue and concrete cooperation. Its added value lies in the synergy and coherence that it creates across the activities implemented by all partners.

Each partner, each stakeholder, operates through its own procedures, and finances its own activities according to its own procedures. In the case of the EU, projects relating to the Northern Dimension are funded through existing financing instruments relevant to the region, including notably the Tacis and Interreg programmes.

The regional organisations in the north have a particularly important role to play, which has been explicitly recognised in the 2nd NDAP. The main regional organisations active in the Northern Dimension are:

- the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)
- the Barents Euro Arctic Council (BEAC)
- the Arctic Council (AC)
- the Nordic Council of Ministers

The international financial institutions (IFIs), as well as the private sector, also have an important role to play in the running of the Northern Dimension, including notably.

- the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)
- the European Investment bank (EIB)
- the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB)
- the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO)
- the Nordic Project Fund (NOPEF)

Euroregions in the Northern Dimension area, such as Karelia, Neman, Saule and Baltika, also play an important role in enhancing the flow of information between stakeholders in the different regions.