

**THE FIRST MINISTERIAL MEETING
OF THE RENEWED NORTHERN DIMENSION
(Saint-Petersburg, October 28, 2008)**

JOINT STATEMENT

The first Ministerial meeting of the renewed Northern Dimension took place in Saint-Petersburg on the 28th of October, 2008. The Russian Federation, as the host party chaired the meeting.

The meeting took 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. Also representatives of the Regional Councils in the North, the International Financial Institutions (IFI) and other institutions and bodies participated. Representatives of the USA and Canada took part in the meeting as observers.

The Ministers took note of the Conclusions of the first Meeting of the ND Senior Officials (Saint-Petersburg, November 21, 2007) and the Progress Report submitted by the ND Steering Group.

They particularly noted that the period, which had passed since the renewed Northern Dimension policy was launched at the Summit in Helsinki on the 24th of November 2006, witnessed considerable intensification of the Northern Dimension policy and growing interest towards it from local and regional authorities, IFIs, the business community, NGOs and other organizations of the civil society, universities and research centers. The Northern Dimension being a regional expression of the EU-Russia Four Common Spaces with full participation of Norway and Iceland has become an efficient political tool for the implementation of the four road maps in matters relevant to the Northern Dimension area.

The Ministers expressed their satisfaction with the level of cooperation between the Northern Dimension and the four 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) and the Arctic Council (AC).

There was general agreement that current funding mechanisms for the ND work well. Co-financing should continue to be the rule for the renewed ND policy. The International Financial Institutions continue their roles as major lenders in the region. The Ministers underlined the importance of the joint Cross-Border Cooperation programmes as among the main instruments of the practical implementation of the Northern Dimension policy.

The Ministers took note of the information of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) as the Chair of the Steering Group of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) and as the manager of the NDEP Support Fund on the activities of the Partnership. The positive steps in disbursements, management and implementation of the NDEP projects were noted. The Ministers expressed their hope that the replenishments recently made by the donors and contributors to the Fund would result in successful accomplishment of the on-going projects and that new projects would soon be added to the NDEP project portfolio.

The Ministers acknowledged the work carried out since the Senior Officials meeting in St. Petersburg in 2007 on how energy efficiency could be fostered by the Northern Dimension and encouraged further ways for the ND to facilitate progress in this area.

The Ministers took note of the report of the Norwegian Presidency of the ND Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS). They welcomed the steps which have been undertaken to intensify the activity, visibility and effectiveness of the Partnership, including the launching of the project and publications data-base and the creation of a 'project pipeline', which matches donors with project ideas. The participants of the meeting welcomed the measures undertaken by the governing bodies of the Partnership to reach an agreement on the legal status of the NDPHS Secretariat which would make it independent. In particular, the decision reached at the latest meeting of the NDPHS Committee of Senior Representatives, aimed at further reinforcing the Partnership was praised by the Ministers. In this regard, they underlined the importance of continued efforts to deliver concrete results based on the principle of co-financing from the ND Partners. Finally, they expressed the appreciation of the support which the CBSS provided to the Partnership Secretariat and welcomed the substantial contributions that have recently been made toward the NDPHS activities.

The Ministers made a decision to establish the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDTLP), based on the recommendation of the ND Steering Group and the conclusions of the *ad-hoc* working group of experts.

The main goal of the new Partnership will be to improve, in compliance with the ecological needs of the region, the major transport connections and logistics between the ND Partners to stimulate sustainable economic growth at the local/regional and global level by focusing on a limited number of priorities that reflect both ND regional and national priorities in a balanced way. The participants of the meeting noted the importance of IFIs in the new Partnership. The Ministers instructed the ND Steering Group to convene a Preparatory Committee to finalize the organizational structure and other remaining work of the NDTLP with the aim to make it operational as of 1 January 2010.

The Ministers emphasized the considerable potential for cultural cooperation in the area of the Northern Dimension. They appreciated the contribution by the Nordic Council of Ministers into the ongoing discussion on perspectives of such cooperation in the ND framework including the possibility to create a Partnership. They instructed the ND Steering Group to set up an *ad-hoc* expert group to examine the issue and to assess the feasibility of such a Partnership. The conclusions are to be reported to the next meeting of the ND Senior Officials that will be convened in the second half of 2009.

The Ministers took note of the ongoing work within the EU to create an EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and underlined the importance that the Northern Dimension can play i.a. in terms of information sharing and transparency of the process.

The Ministers also underlined the growing importance of the Arctic Region and instructed the Steering Group to consider further ways in how the Northern Dimension could contribute.

The Ministers acknowledged the importance of sub-regional and sub-state cooperation between local and regional entities and actors. The fostering of direct links and contacts between these actors should be further encouraged.

The Ministerial Meeting concluded that the successful re-launching of the Northern Dimension policy has shown that through co-ownership constructive cooperation is possible on a range of projects producing benefit to citizens of the Partners and that the ND retains much potential for future development.