

## **THE THIRD MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE RENEWED NORTHERN DIMENSION**

**Brussels, 18 February 2013**

### **JOINT STATEMENT**

The third Ministerial meeting of the renewed Northern Dimension (ND) was convened in Brussels on the 18th of February 2013, hosted by the European Union and chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission.

The meeting was attended by the four Northern Dimension Partners – the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation – at Foreign Minister or equivalent level.

The Northern Dimension participants – the Regional Councils, the International Financial Institutions – as well as other representatives involved in Northern Dimension cooperation also participated in the meeting. Representatives of the USA and Canada attended the meeting as observers.

The Ministers underlined the key role of the Northern Dimension – representing an equal partnership of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland – in fostering prosperity, sustainable development and well-being through regional cooperation in Northern Europe, drawing on the geographic proximity, economic interdependence and common cultural heritage of the participants. The Ministers underlined the positive role that the Northern Dimension policy can play in the EU-Russia agenda, including the EU-Russia Partnership for Modernisation and the EU-Russia cross-border cooperation.

The Ministers welcomed the progress made in broadening and deepening the Northern Dimension cooperation in the Baltic Sea and Barents regions. The Ministers underlined the need for close co-operation between the Northern Dimension structures and the regional councils in the North. The Ministers called for active measures in order to strengthen the interplay and synergies between the various actors in the Baltic Sea and Barents regions, encouraging, where appropriate, joint meetings.

The activities of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership are making a significant contribution to environmental protection in the Baltic Sea and Barents regions. The recent establishment of a Support Fund to co-finance project activities of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics establishes an important channel to develop the transport and trade connections throughout the Northern Dimension region.

The Ministers acknowledged that the Baltic Sea and Barents regions have gained increasing importance on the policy agendas of the Northern Dimension partners as reflected in regional development strategies and other recently adopted policy documents. The Ministers agreed to intensify co-operation based on common interests, by identifying joint priority areas, building on the work already done and seeking a more systematic approach. The Ministers asked the ND Steering group to reflect on ways to achieve this goal and to report back to the next Senior Officials Meeting. Full use should be made of the ND policy dialogue and decision making structures and the potential of the ND Partnerships. The activities of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) and HELCOM were noted with satisfaction and should be taken into account. The Ministers noted that the key priority areas of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) coincide with areas of activity of all four ND Partnerships. They therefore encouraged close cooperation with the relevant bodies of the BEAC.

Building on the Conclusions of the third Senior Officials meeting held in Reykjavik on 8 November 2011 and taking note of the third Progress Report, covering the period from the second Ministerial meeting on 2 November 2010 in Oslo, the meeting provided an opportunity for the Ministers to review the progress of the various ND Partnerships and initiatives, and to provide further guidance on future work. In particular, the Ministers:

- Recognized the significant value of the **Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP)**, which celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2011, and commended the donors and contributors to the Support Fund for their replenishments, both in the environmental and nuclear windows of the Support Fund.
- Welcomed the NDEP's achievements in strengthening its portfolio of projects tackling environmental problems in the region as well as improving energy efficiency, and invited the Partnership to consider new areas of activity in light of the discussion launched in the NDEP Assembly.
- Looked forward to the upcoming accomplishment of two major projects in 2013: the opening of the St. Petersburg Neva Tunnel Collector and the inauguration of the Kaliningrad Waste-Water Treatment Plant, which is planned to take place during spring 2013, emphasising that the achievement of the Kaliningrad project will mark the end of discharging untreated wastewater from major cities directly into the Baltic Sea.
- Welcomed the good progress of the NDEP nuclear safety projects in the Barents region.
- Welcomed the entry into force of the Agreement on the Establishment of the Secretariat of the **Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS)**. The Ministers welcomed Sweden's willingness to host the Secretariat. They encouraged the remaining NDPHS Partner Countries to sign and ratify the Agreement and looked forward to the rapid commencement of the Secretariat's operations.

- Expressed appreciation for the work done by the NDPHS to raise the profile of health and social well-being on the regional agenda. The Ministers commended NDPHS for the successful work as priority area coordinator for health in implementing the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and recognized the Partnership's achievements in fostering regional cooperation in health sector.

- Welcomed the establishment of the Support Fund of the **Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL)**, in accordance with the joint understanding achieved at the Partnership's High Level Meeting in Oslo on 21 November 2012, and expressed their appreciation for contributions announced by the donors at the Constituting Assembly of Support Fund in Helsinki on 11 December 2012. They encouraged other NDPTL partner countries to contribute to the Support Fund. They also welcomed the active role of the Secretariat of the NDPTL and expressed their gratitude for the Nordic Investment Bank's (NIB) valuable cooperation and support to the NDPTL Secretariat.

- Congratulated the NDPTL on laying the basis for future cooperation in transport and logistics sector in the Northern Dimension area. The Ministers emphasized the positive role of the Partnership in fostering transport and logistics projects in close cooperation with Governments and IFIs. The Ministers encouraged the NDPTL to develop the first projects with a regional dimension and a regional added value, to be supported by the NDPTL Fund and based on the NDPTL Regional network established by the NDPTL High Level Meeting in Oslo.

- The Ministers acknowledged the potential of the **Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)** in supporting the development of the cultural and creative industries sector. The Ministers welcomed the success of the NPDC conference on Financial Opportunities for Cultural and Creative Industries in the Northern Dimension area, organised in Warsaw on 4-5 December 2012. The Ministers invited the Partnership to further enhance cooperation with other cultural and creative industries actors, and with the business community and academia.

- Expressed appreciation to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Northern Dimension Business Council (NDBC) for organising a **Northern Dimension Stakeholder Conference** on 18 February 2013 in Brussels in the margins of the ND Ministerial meeting and welcomed the stakeholders' active involvement in ND cooperation.

- The Ministers recognized the added value the **Northern Dimension Institute (NDI)** has brought to the ND in co-operation with the Northern Dimension Partnerships and Northern Dimension Business Council, *inter alia* their recent joint projects with the NDPHS and NDPTL. The Ministers called for the ND Steering Group to seek a sustainable financing solution for the Institute.

- Commended the **Northern Dimension Business Council's** (NDBC) achievements in building up an extensive network of companies and urged the NDBC to further enhance cooperation with the Northern Dimension structures.

- Took note of the Conference Statement of **the Second Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum**, held on 22-23 February 2011 in Tromsø, Norway. The Ministers welcomed the Parliamentarians' active interest in Northern Dimension cooperation and commended the Conference Statement for paying close attention to Northern Dimension structures as important instruments to fulfill regionally important objectives. The Ministers looked forward to the upcoming Third Northern Dimension Forum, to be organised in St. Petersburg in spring 2013.

The Ministers took note of Norway's offer to host the next Northern Dimension Senior Officials' Meeting in early 2014.