

# **THE SIXTH SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING OF THE RENEWED NORTHERN DIMENSION**

**Brussels, 5 March 2019**

## **CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS**

The sixth meeting of the Senior Officials of the renewed Northern Dimension took place in Brussels on 5 March 2019. The meeting was hosted on a rotative basis by the European Union and attended by the Senior Officials of the four Northern Dimension partners - the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation.

The Northern Dimension participants; the regional councils, international financial institutions and other representatives involved in Northern Dimension cooperation also participated in the meeting. Belarus, Canada and the USA attended the meeting as observers.

The Senior Officials exchanged views and discussed the development within the Northern Dimension since the Senior Officials Meeting held in Reykjavik in 2016.

The Senior Officials noted that 2019 is the 20th year since the inauguration of the original Northern Dimension policy in 1999. The renewed Northern Dimension was launched in Helsinki in 2006. The Senior Officials recognised the benefits and importance of the Northern Dimension policy; providing a unique multilateral framework to address practical common challenges in the Northern Dimension area on the basis of shared confidence and common responsibility; offering platforms for dialogue on multiple levels and in multiple fields of policymaking covered by the policy's framework document; strengthening parliamentary connections and private sector contacts.

The Senior Officials highlighted the importance of people-to-people contacts, including the involvement of the younger generations into current initiatives. They recognised the need to address climate change as a common goal. They encouraged further joint work on both Baltic Sea Region and Euro-Arctic matters, using the Northern Dimension partnerships and structures for dialogue, joint projects and scientific cooperation; while taking into account the livelihood of Euro-Arctic inhabitants, including indigenous peoples; and advancing sustainable development. They instructed the Steering Group to take forward work in these fields, i.a. by elaborating and following up on concrete action points.

The Senior Officials noted the progress made in identifying areas of cooperation in the Northern Dimension structures and programmes, as well as increasing cooperation and coherence between the Northern Dimension, the regional councils and other relevant organisations.

The Senior Officials expressed the need to continue to operationalise ways and means to identify common themes and priorities within regional cooperation. Greater efforts to create and increase synergies and identify areas of common interest and concern between different regional strategies and various cooperation formats, such as the Northern Dimension structures and the regional councils, will contribute to more effective cooperation and to the achievement of concrete results. To that effect the Senior Officials instructed the Northern Dimension Steering Group to identify complementarities between Northern Dimension structures, the regional councils and common objectives of regional strategies and to formulate a proposal for the next concrete action to be taken by the Partners.

The Senior Officials took note with satisfaction of the entering into force of all financing agreements for joint cross-border cooperation programmes and transnational programmes between the EU Member-States, the Russian Federation, and Norway. They also noted the development of regional cooperation through the instruments of other regional cooperation programmes in the Northern

Dimension area (Nord, Northern Periphery and Arctic, Bothnia-Atlantica, etc.). Cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes continue to provide a useful tool for the Northern Dimension partners, in a spirit of co-funding, to address particular opportunities and challenges brought about by geographical proximity. The involvement of partners in these formats of cooperation should be further encouraged.

The practical implementation of these programmes should also be closely linked to the wider objectives of the Northern Dimension policy, take full advantage of the existing Northern Dimension formats and initiatives and provide a useful mechanism to increase the intensity of cooperation with the regional councils and other relevant actors in the region. The Senior Officials tasked the Northern Dimension Steering Group to include a state of play on cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes as a standing item on their agendas in order to enhance closer cooperation between different programmes and initiatives.

### **Northern Dimension Partnerships**

The Senior Officials reviewed and noted the status and progress within the four Northern Dimension partnerships and were briefed on the on-going and up-coming projects, work plans and initiatives within the partnerships.

The Senior Officials took note of and appreciated the concrete achievements by the **Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP)** in their environmental work in Russia and Belarus. The key developments since 2016 include:

- The completion of a new **wastewater treatment plant in Kaliningrad** (June 2017);
- The completion of the works to upgrade wastewater treatment facilities at the **Northern Wastewater Treatment Plant in St. Petersburg** (October 2017);
- The inauguration of a **new wastewater treatment plant in Petrozavodsk** (December 2017);
- The completion of a **district heating project in Kaliningrad** (February 2019).

Benefitting from successful international cooperation within the framework of the NDEP, these major cities located in the Baltic and Barents Seas region are now better capable of treating wastewater in full compliance with HELCOM standards.

The Senior Officials also noted good progress in the rehabilitation of wastewater treatment facilities in Belarus where NDEP grants are co-financing projects in Vitebsk, Grodno, Brest, Lida, Polotsk and Baranovichi – all located in the Baltic Sea catchment area. They also noted:

- The **ongoing district heating project** in Vologda;
- The **ongoing energy efficiency project** dealing with Baranovichi street lighting;
- The **ongoing wastewater projects** in Petrozavodsk and Baranovichi;
- The new **projects launched to address black carbon emissions** from local heat and power generation in Karelia and Vologda.

The Senior Officials also acknowledged key achievements of the NDEP nuclear window projects in the Barents region:

- The **decommissioning of the nuclear ship *Lepse*** with its hazardous waste placed in a specially designed storage facility in 2018, now being prepared for loading and shipment.
- The ongoing **shipment of spent nuclear fuel assemblies from Andreeva Bay**. The assemblies contain spent nuclear fuel from over 100 reactors removed from over 50 Soviet nuclear submarines. To date over 3,000 units have been removed from site.

These two important milestones are a culmination of work which started in 2002 and which will greatly enhance the safety of the local population and of the wider region. The Senior Officials appreciated this remarkable example of international cooperation, including in particular with the Russian partners, on matters of regional as well as global importance.

The Senior Officials also acknowledged new efforts by the NDEP to address climate change in the Euro-Arctic region by focusing on the impacts of black carbon emissions and other short-lived climate pollutants. In 2018, the NDEP Assembly of Donors approved grants to support several small scale investments in pilot projects aiming to reduce black carbon emissions.

The Senior Officials called on the NDEP to address the still numerous environmental challenges within its mandate, presently lasting until 2022 and to continue the implementation of projects to improve wastewater treatment, solid waste management and energy efficiency to improve the environment in the Northern Dimension region. The potential for NDEP co-financing to address problems related to the hazardous waste disposal site located in Krasny Bor near St. Petersburg should be considered. The Senior Officials also encouraged exploring ways to engage the partnership in regional discussions on broad environmental issues, such as the circular economy, climate change awareness raising and climate change mitigation.

The Senior Officials thanked the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) for the management of the NDEP support fund.

The Senior Officials took note of the work done in the context of the **Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL)**. They thanked the Nordic Investment Bank for hosting the NDPTL secretariat and for its management of the NDPTL Support Fund on behalf of the donors. They acknowledged that the NDPTL is relevant as a tool to face present and future challenges in the development of the transport system of the region and the improvement of international logistics chains. They called on the partners to prolong the activities of the NDPTL for the next period of five years.

The Senior Officials welcomed the continued operation of the NDPTL Support Fund with nine projects in Finland, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden receiving grants. Seven projects have been successfully implemented, proving that the NDPTL Support Fund mechanism may act as a catalyst to raise substantial additional funding for the final implementation of projects.

The Senior Officials welcomed the decision of the NDPTL High Level Meeting of 8 December 2017 setting out partnership priorities for the coming years as:

- **Meeting the need for the reduction of greenhouse gases and the promotion of ecologically friendly transport;**
- **“Vision Zero” - Zero Road Deaths and serious injuries;**
- **Digitalisation, including Intelligent Transport Systems and Global Satellite Navigation, robotisation and automatisation;**
- **New Emerging trade routes, including connections to Asia;**
- **Sharing best practices on transport education.**

They called on work on new activities encompassing these priorities in a regional dimension with regional added value, to be supported by the partnership's support fund.

The Senior Officials took note of the preliminary partnership evaluation results and called on the partners to finalise the partnership's Roadmap and an accompanying Action Plan, based on the agreed priorities and deliberations following the final evaluation results; create working groups for exchanges on the priorities and their possible implementation; and to ensure that the resources available for the partnership, including human resources, are consistent with the future aims of the partnership.

They stressed the importance of continuing cooperation with other relevant regional councils and bodies, such as the Barents working groups for Transport and Logistics and called on the NDPTL to bring this work forward.

The Senior Officials took note of the information presented by the **Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS)**. They agreed that the NDPHS provides a unique platform for concerted action in the area of health and social well-being through better collaboration

and coordination of international activities, as well as by bringing together experts from the region to learn from each other. They welcomed the NDPHS' cooperation with other important regional actors, including the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS).

The Senior Officials welcomed the results of the NDPHS' recent work in the areas of antimicrobial resistance, tuberculosis and HIV, non-communicable diseases, primary health care and occupational health, as well as the successful ministerial-level Annual Partnership Conference in Tallinn on 9 February, 2018 that adopted "**the NDPHS Declaration on Alcohol Policy**". The partnership's work will contribute to international and governmental organisations and policy makers to make evidence-based decisions. The Senior Officials welcomed the future plans of the NDPHS, in particular the ongoing work towards developing a common NDPHS framework for **a horizontal programme addressing population ageing and the continuing work of the Expert Groups towards improved health and social well-being**, and called on the NDPHS to further pursue this approach, also through the broader cooperation with regional partners.

The Senior Officials acknowledged the further development of the **Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)** and its potential towards growth of the cultural and creative industries sector in the area. They welcomed the partnership's continued work on network development, knowledge building and policy exchange. They welcomed the NDPC initiated studies in creative innovation and cultural tourism and linking these studies to hands-on work with practitioners, as well as the development of synergies with other cultural and creative initiatives in the region. They called on national ministries and relevant regional actors to further cooperate in support of the work of the NDPC and to further support and build on on-going activities between NDPC partners' organisations.

They welcomed the signing of the Agreement on the Establishment of the Secretariat of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture, to be hosted in Riga; welcomed the appointment of the new Head of the Secretariat and positively evaluated the progress achieved in drafting the Host Country Agreement. They greeted the success of the partnership's Annual Forums in St. Petersburg, and called on the partnership to continue close cooperation with the Northern Dimension Institute, the Northern Dimension Business Council and relevant regional cooperation structures, such as the regional councils, to further regional and cross-sectorial links.

The Senior Officials recognised the work of the **Northern Dimension Institute (NDI)** and its coordinators - Aalto University, Northern (Arctic) Federal University and St.Petersburg State University of Economics in informing and publicising the Northern Dimension policy. They thanked the NDI for the Future Forums organised in 2018 and for the subsequent policy briefs.

The Senior Officials welcomed the three-year funding 2019-2021 by the European Commission for enabling the NDI to work as a regional think tank. This should enhance evidence-based policy-making and policy relevance of thematic research in the Northern Dimension area and support the Northern Dimension partnerships in their research-based information needs.

The Institute will continue to approach the Northern Dimension policy and partnerships' actions holistically. Particular focus is placed on the jointly identified topics of interest and future challenges related to:

- **Climate change and reducing black carbon emissions in the Euro-Arctic region;**
- **Emerging land and Arctic maritime trade routes between Europe and Asia;**
- **Healthy ageing;**
- **Opportunities of culture and creativity in solving societal challenges.**

An annual Northern Dimension Future Forum will serve as a key event bringing together researchers, policy-makers and professionals to discuss the research-inspired solutions for pressing future challenges, as well as raising awareness of Northern Dimension co-operation.

The Senior Officials acknowledged the **Northern Dimension Business Council's (NDBC)** efforts in maintaining a platform for interaction between private companies and regional authorities, and noted the cooperation the business council has had with the partnership on culture in its annual business forums. They welcomed the tenth **Annual Northern Dimension Business Forum**, to be organised in St. Petersburg on 4 April 2019 together with the Association of European Businesses (AEB) and the St. Petersburg State University Graduate School of Management and encouraged wide participation. The Senior Officials encouraged the NDBC to further work together with other Northern Dimension structures, regional actors and financial institutions.

The Senior Officials took note of the Conference statement of the fifth **Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum**, held on 22 October 2017 in Brussels and welcomed the parliamentarians' active and constructive interest in Northern Dimension cooperation. The Senior Officials welcomed the upcoming sixth Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum, to be organised and hosted by the Norwegian Parliament in Bodø, on 18–20 November 2019.

The Senior Officials instructed the Northern Dimension Steering Group to examine the potential for identifying ways of coordinated financial support of the partners to the project activities of the Northern Dimension policy, in close cooperation with the partnerships, for the development of the policy in accordance with the commonly established priorities.

The Senior Officials agreed that in accordance with institutional arrangements agreed in the Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document meetings of the **Northern Dimension Steering Group** should continue to be held three times a year and **Senior Officials' Meetings** whenever necessary and at least every two years to ensure policy coordination. The Senior Officials also agreed to task the Northern Dimension Steering Group to examine the possibilities for convening a ministerial level meeting within the Northern Dimension in 2020.