

THE NORTHERN DIMENSION; BASIC INFORMATION

The Northern Dimension

Discussion on the Northern Dimension first started when Finland, Sweden and Norway in the autumn of 1994 were preparing their referendums on joining the European Union. Officially Finland's initiative was presented in September 1997 in Rovaniemi in a speech given by Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen.

Finland drew the attention of the EU member states and the Commission to the possibilities offered by Northern Europe, on one hand, and to various challenges, on the other. Development of co-operation in the region between the enlarging Union and the Russian Federation was aimed at enhancing stability, sustainable development and positive interdependency. The Northern Dimension became official EU policy in June 1999, as the general political guidelines for the Northern Dimension were adopted by the European Council. The actual work on developing co-operation between the Union and the partner countries Norway, Iceland, the Russian Federation and the then EU candidate states Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Estonia, was begun during Finland's presidency in the autumn 1999. Canada and the United States are participating in the co-operation as observer countries. Canada is also contributing to the Northern Dimension partnerships (see below).

The Action Plan

In June 2000 during Portugal's presidency, the First Action Plan for the Northern Dimension for the years 2000 -2003 was adopted by the European Council in Feira. The Plan set out objectives and defined actions to be undertaken in different sectors, such as environment and natural resources, justice and home affairs, support to trade and investments, public health, energy, transport, information society, nuclear safety, scientific research and cross-border co-operation. The second Northern Dimension Action Plan 2004-2006 was adopted at the Brussels European Council in October 2003. Preparatory work was carried out not only by the member states, but also within regional bodies, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Arctic Council, and the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Action Plan is wide-ranging and multi-sectoral by its nature. It defines economy, human resources, environment, cross-border co-operation and justice and home affairs as the five priority sectors for the Northern Dimension. The Arctic and Kaliningrad are mentioned as special crosscutting themes.
(See http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/north_dim/ndap/ap2.pdf)

Implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan

The European Commission has an leadrole within the EU in the implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan. This does not exclude the active participation of the member and the partner countries and the regional councils in the project

identification and implementation processes. As the question is of a common benefit for the whole Union, it is important that all member states contribute to the effort.

The EU financing to the Northern Dimension comes from the Community instruments and programmes, such as INTERREG AND TACIS. Joint funding of projects by international financing institutions and the Commission with member and partner countries, as well as locating sources of private financing, is becoming increasingly essential in implementing the Northern Dimension.

Implementation of the Northern Dimension is assessed by the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) to be convened every second year. Political guidance on the implementation of the Action Plan, and on its future development will be provided by Ministerial conferences, to be held in those years when the Senior Officials meeting is not convened.

Significant co-operation sectors of the Northern Dimension

High priority is given to environmental questions in the Northern Dimension. The Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) was created to carry out projects in environmental, nuclear waste and nuclear safety sectors. Apart from the EU member states, the Commission and partner countries, also international financing institutions participate in financing of the projects. In particular the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) play a central role in promoting the NDEP. At present the funds available to NDEP total ca. € 225 million, from which two thirds have been earmarked for nuclear safety projects. Finland has allocated € 2 million for the nuclear safety window and € 10 million for the environment window of the Partnership. The primary focus of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership are the wastewater and other municipal services projects in North-West Russia and the nuclear waste located in the Kola Peninsula. One of the priority projects for Finland was the construction of the southwest wastewater treatment plant of St. Petersburg. The construction of the plant was completed in September 2005.

www.ndep.org

The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Wellbeing was established at a high-level conference in October 2003 in Oslo. The objective of the partnership is to enhance health and welfare of the inhabitants in the Northern Dimension Area by promoting healthy lifestyles, preventing communicable diseases (such as HIV/Aids) and non-communicable diseases, and also by promoting co-operation between various health and social services. A small secretariat established for the Partnership began its work in Stockholm in autumn 2004.

www.ndphs.org

Questions related to the development of an information society have also been emphasized. The Northern e-Dimension Action Plan (NeDAP) is designed to supplement EU projects that aim at strengthening the information society. The Programme consists of seven parts, where Finland together with Germany is responsible for the eSkills Action Line.

Future of the Northern Dimension

The present ND Action Plan will expire in the end of 2006. The Northern Dimension Ministerial Meeting on 21 November, 2005, decided that while maintaining the special features of the Northern Dimension, it should also promote the implementation of the Four Common Spaces at regional, subregional and local level. In order to strengthen the commitment of all parties, the ND action plans will be replaced by a political framework document which will be negotiated and adopted jointly by the EU and the present partner countries the Russian Federation, Norway and Iceland. These countries will thus become equal parties to the Northern Dimension.

The negotiations on the political framework document started in the beginning of 2006 on the basis of the Guidelines adopted at the ND Ministerial Meeting. The framework document and a political declaration will be adopted in the autumn of 2006, during the Finnish EU Presidency (24 Nov. 2006).

The Northern Dimension partnerships will also in the future have an important role in the practical implementation of the Northern Dimension. The present partnerships, the Environmental partnership and the Partnership in Public Health and Social Wellbeing, should therefore be further supported. Also possibility of new partnerships, especially in the field of transport and logistics, is being elaborated.