Parliamentary Conference on the Northern Dimension

Conference Statement

1 March 2007

Members of the European Parliament, of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, of the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, of the Baltic Assembly, of the Nordic Council, and of the network of Barents parliamentarians, met at the Parliamentary Conference on the Northern Dimension in the European Parliament in Brussels on 28 February - 1 March 2007 to debate the new Northern Dimension policy and to prepare for the arranging of a Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum.

The two main themes for discussion were the Northern Dimension policies related to the Arctic Region and to the Baltic Sea region.

The participants of the Conference having regard to the Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document and the Political Declaration on the Northern Dimension Policy approved on 24 November 2006, welcome the updated, more permanent, high profile, and structured Northern Dimension Policy that came into force on 1 January 2007 and support the suggestion to hold a Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum which could improve the role of the parliamentarians of the Northern Dimension region in the implementation of the new Northern Dimension Policy.

The Parliamentary Conference on the Northern Dimension:

1. supports the increased focus on a joint ownership of the new policy by all actors involved; emphasizes, in this context, the importance of Iceland, Norway and Russia being active partners of the new Northern Dimension policy; further notes that the principle of joint ownership should not only apply to the Northern Dimension partners, but to all stakeholders in the region including the regional councils of the North and their parliamentary bodies;

2. supports the overall aim of the Northern Dimension to provide a common framework for the promotion of dialogue and concrete cooperation, strengthening stability, well-being and intensified economic cooperation, promotion of economic integration and competitiveness and sustainable development in Northern Europe;

3. considers the desire to make the Northern Dimension policy a regional expression of the four EU/Russia Common Spaces a constructive and much wanted step forward; believes that it is important that the Northern Dimension aims at filling the four EU/Russia Common Spaces with concrete content, while at the same time focusing on other issues of specific relevance in the North such as its fragile environment, indigenous peoples' issues, cultural diversity and health and social well-being; calls on, to this end, all owners of

the Northern Dimension policy to actively work towards achieving the Northern Dimension objectives, as they also are expressed in the Northern Dimension Arctic Window;

4. draws attention to the priority areas for the Northern Dimension policy: the Baltic Sea, the Kaliningrad oblast with its opportunities for development given its particular geographical situation, as well as the extensive Arctic and Sub-arctic areas including the Barents Region;

5. underlines the role of the Arctic as an early warning area for global climate change; stresses that rapid Arctic warming is likely to have major implications for the whole planet and needs to be addressed globally; emphasizes that climate change and increased ultraviolet radiation in the Arctic have a major impact on the social, cultural and economic well-being of Arctic people; notes, in this context, the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region's call for, in its resolution of 4 August 2006, the adoption of a clear cut, visible and dynamic Arctic policy within the Northern Dimension; underlines that mapping, recognizing and use of indigenous peoples traditional knowledge as a basis for developing the principles of vulnerability and adaptation capacity as a possible tool for future spatial planning, institutional frame working and mitigate measures, to prepare all residents of the High North for the new situation on climate change;

6. recognizes the significance and the potential that the International Polar Year 2007/2008 holds for the promotion of the Arctic region and the development of Arctic science, as well as for the possibility of creating a Charter for Arctic Governance;

7. emphasizes the importance to ensure that the exploitation of the resources and the management of the marine environment in the Barents Sea area is done in an environmentally sound and sustainable manner;

8. underlines the economic significance of the Baltic Sea region with its high growth rates, strong science base and high innovation potential to Europe as a whole; supports, to this end, the work for a Baltic Sea Strategy for the Northern Dimension in order to create favourable conditions for a prosperous, socially balanced, and ecologically sustainable development of the Baltic Sea region; calls attention to the fragile environmental status of the Baltic Sea;

9. emphasizes that the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership is a successful example of practical achievements within the Northern Dimension, stresses the importance of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Health and Social Well-Being; asks, in this context, all Northern Dimension partners to examine the possibility of applying the Partnership model to other priority areas such as transport and logistics, as well as energy;

10. calls on closer cooperation regarding marine security, especially regarding search and rescue matters;

11. calls attention to the principle of co-financing from Northern Dimension partners, as well as from international and private financial institutions where appropriate, as the general rule of funding Northern Dimension activities; asks all owners of the Northern Dimension policy to ensure that sufficient means are allocated to Northern Dimension projects and actions; welcomes in this context the streamlining of the EU funding of the Northern Dimension policy under the new European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI); encourages strong involvement of international regional organizations, international financial institutions, regional and local public organizations, other public bodies and private sources in the implementation of the Northern Dimension policy;

12. welcomes the clearer institutional set-up for Northern Dimension cooperation, coordination and consultation; emphasizes, in this context, that it is of crucial importance for the credibility and implementation of the Northern Dimension to strengthen coordination and cooperation at various levels among European, national, regional, sub-regional, and local authorities, based on the principle of subsidiarity;

13. recognizes the somewhat unstructured overlap of competencies between parliamentary fora in the northern regions; calls for, to this end, the arranging of a recurrent event, a Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum, with a flexible structure and ownership, to promote the coordination and exchange of views between different institutions for regional cooperation in the North;

14. highlights that a Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum would provide representatives of the parliaments of the EU Member States, the European Parliament, the parliaments of Iceland, Norway and Russia, together with the parliaments of the Northern Dimension observer states Canada and the USA and the elected representatives from indigenous peoples' and regional parliamentary assemblies, opportunities for discussion, new initiatives and oversight; emphasizes that it would further bring about a greater democratic legitimacy to the Northern Dimension as it would constitute an essential component in facilitating democratic parliamentary monitoring of the Northern Dimension policy;

15. emphasizes that a Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum could improve the role of the parliamentarians of the Northern Dimension region from the Ural mountains to the Atlantic Ocean in the implementation of the new Northern Dimension policy, including the improvement of the conditions for border crossing of people and goods;

16. calls on the President of the European Parliament and the Speakers of the parliaments of Iceland, Norway and Russia to prepare for the arranging of the Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum to be held every two years in order to discuss issues of common concern and examine the evolution of the new Northern Dimension policy.