

EEA Consultative Committee

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RESOLUTION
on
THE EU'S NORTHERN DIMENSION

Rapporteurs:

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 In December 1998 the Vienna Summit of the European Council decided to include the Northern dimension to become a part of the activities of the European union. The European Commission had drawn a communication in which the outlines and goals of the Northern dimension were proposed.

1.2 The Northern dimension is a long term political concept focusing on efforts to diminish political, economic and social differences between the countries in the northern Europe. The basic objects of the northern dimension can be seen as follows:

- to promote prosperity, stability and security, to prevent environmental pollution, to reduce nuclear risks and international crime
- to emphasise the beneficial mutual dependence between Russia, the Baltic Sea Region, the Nordic countries and the European union
- to strengthen the targeting and the co-ordination of the Union's programmes for assistance and to clarify the main priorities of economic co-operation in the northern Europe.

1.3 The countries covered by the Northern dimension differ from each other: there are the member states of the European Union, there are the applicant countries (Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), there are the northern EEA countries (Norway and Iceland) and there is Russia with its agreement for partnership and co-operation (PCA) with the EU. The Northern dimension is to be a cohesive force to these concepts.

1.4 The General Affairs Council supported in May 1999 the outlines proposed by the Commission and the Cologne Summit of the European Council decided in June 1999 to continue with the preparations of the Northern dimension.

1.5 In November 1999 a Ministerial Conference about the Northern dimension was arranged in Helsinki. The Foreign ministers or representatives of the ministers from the member states, the northern EEA EFTA states, the applicant countries in the region and from Russia participated in the conference.

1.6 The Conference launched generally approved Conclusions of the Chair. These conclusions outline the sectors and the priorities for the Northern dimension. It was recommended that an action plan should be prepared.

1.7 The Conference also encouraged multilateral co-operation between socio-economic organisations and particularly between labour market partners in the region and recommended closer links between these organisations and relevant European co-operation bodies.

1.8 The Helsinki Summit of the European Council stated in December 1999 in the Presidency Conclusions that *"The European Council welcomes the conclusions of the Foreign Ministers' Conference on the northern dimension held 11 and 12 November 1999 in Helsinki and the intention of the future Swedish Presidency to organise a high-level follow-up. The European Council invites the Commission to prepare, in co-operation with the Council and in consultation with the partner countries, an Action Plan for the northern dimension with a view to presenting it for endorsement at the Feira European Council in June 2000"*.

1.9 The European Commission has in spring 2000 prepared the action plan. During the preparations the partner countries were also consulted. The action plan is presented in mid June 2000 to the European Council for endorsement. The implementation is to be foreseen to start during the French EU Presidency in the second half of 2000.

2. CONCLUSIONS

2.1 The EEA Consultative Committee (EEA-CC) underlines the importance of the development of the Northern dimension of the EU. The Northern dimension covers, among others the EEA EFTA countries in the northern Europe (Norway and Iceland) and is important to all countries concerned in the region.

2.2 The EEA-CC welcomes the Conclusions by the European Council in December 1999 to prepare an action plan and the fact, that it is to be presented for adoption in June 2000. This action plan should be appropriately implemented without delay.

2.3 The EEA-CC expresses its satisfaction that also partner countries have been consulted during the preparations. EEA is an important context in this sense and the consultations should be strengthened in forthcoming efforts, too.

2.4 The EEA-CC expresses its support to the recommendations and proposals in the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee¹ and launches these conclusions with a request, that they would be taken into account in the implementation and the development of the action plan.

2.5 The EEA-CC would underline above all the following topics which should get priority in the implementation of the action plan :

- Dismantling barriers to trade and investment by the promotion of the operational environment for business: economic legislation should be stabilised and public bodies for monitoring compliance (taxation, customs, consumers, certification etc.) should be strengthened

¹

"The EU's northern dimension including relations with Russia" (CES 945/99), October 1999

- Restructuring facilities for the exploitation of natural resources (oil, gas, forest, mining) and the development and integration of infrastructures and logistics in telecommunication, transport and energy
- Strengthening border-management and cross-border co-operation, including the tackling of crime and corruption
- Establishing and strengthening proper labour market relations and employment and social security supporting activities in co-operation with the economic and social actors from the countries in the region. This would request also efforts to establish multilateral co-operation between these actors.

2.6 Technical assistance and education should be the main instruments in parallel with material investments in most of the priorities mentioned above.

2.7 A strong governance and targeting of the financing of Northern dimension projects must be established. New innovative financing instruments and co-financing concepts should be sought, allocating resources from all the countries concerned, as well as from the EU, IFIs and the private sector. The EEA-CC recommends that this should also be addressed in the EEA context, based on joint projects for co-financing.

2.8 Acknowledging the need for private enterprises and business participation in the implementing of the Northern dimension, action should be taken to secure involvement of the private sector in all countries concerned.

2.9 The EEA-CC recommends, that the monitoring of the implementation, as well as the further development of the action plan would need an efficient multilateral forum for administration and co-operation in northern Europe. Such a forum should spring from the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC).

2.10 The EEA-CC is of the opinion that sector individual projects should be identified in the further development of the action plan.

2.11 The EEA-CC proposes that the Northern dimension should be taken as a standing point at the agenda of the EEA Council. The EEA Council should be well engaged in the implementation and further development of the action plan, as well as in the preparation of the high-level conference, which has been scheduled by Sweden and which will take place during the Swedish EU Presidency in 2001. As the Northern dimension is closely linked with the Baltic Sea Region co-operation and the relations with Russia, these topics should also be up-graded at the agenda of the EEA Council. The EEA-CC would be happy to assist with advice and recommendations when dealing with this topic.

