The Union's policies: a Northern dimension, Russia and Baltic countries. Vienna European Council

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The principal objective of this 2002 Progress Report is to give an overview of the most important steps taken by the European Commission to implement the Northern Dimension Action Plan endorsed by the European Council in Freira in June 2000. The text is divided into thematic sectors. Each section features the main overall policy objectives at the beginning, followed by elements on types of activities and examples of concrete projects. On the matter of the political framework, the report states that bilateral and multilateral dialogue with Northern Dimension partners has been carried out in the last few months. With regard to bilateral relations with the Russian Federation, the report notes that there has been little progress on the Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme. This framework agreement has not been concluded despite diplomatic efforts by all parties. The report goes on outline projects with Canada and with the candidate countries belonging to the Northern Dimension. Turning to the priority sectors, seven are discussed: Infrastructure: The Northern Dimension area has vast energy resources and is very important for the supply of oil and gas to the EU. In order to secure the supply, a considerable level of investment will be required, in the next few years, for the development of the energy transport infrastructures and for the exploitation of the vast gas resources of the area. (See COM(2001)775). Another important aspect of the energy sector is related to structural reforms needed in view of the integration of some countries of the region into a single European energy market. As far as transport is concerned, improvement of infrastructure is vital for the development of the economy of the region. The overall objective is to develop a multi-modal transport system improving connections within the region and with neighbours. On information and communication technology, the Northern Dimension offers a platform helping to accelerate the transition to the information society. Due to the complexities of the region, there is a need for coordinated activities and increased commitment from national governments and other key actors. The report details the activities of NeDAP. Environment and Nuclear Safety: The Commission pays great attention to this sector. The main priorities remain environmental hotspots of air and water, climate change, monitoring, cleaner production in SMEs, EIA review mechanisms and nuclear safety. The EU plays a central role in reducing the risks stemming from radioactive waste, spent fuel, nuclear submarines and obsolete nuclear reactors. The Commission has carried out several activities, mainly in the Kola Peninsula and in the Archangelsk Region, where several TACIS projects have been initiated, and in Lithuania, for the Ignalina NPP. Public health: Tackling the spread of communicable diseases and restructuring the health care systems in Russia and in the candidate countries continue to be among the principal objectives. Particular attention has been paid recently to broaden the scope of public health actions to include life-style related factors such as tobacco, drug and alcohol abuse, and nutrition, as well as initiatives to improve social protection to counteract thedecline of life expectancy in the area. Economic and Business Co-operation, trade and investment promotion: The objectives are: -to encourage in each partner country the development of a legal and administrative framework that is conducive to business development; -removing barriers to trade and investment, notable through the mechanisms of the Europe Agreements (Baltic States and Poland) and the Partnership Cooperation Agreement (Russia) and support of Russia's accession to he WTO; -promoting the development of policies that support entrepreneurship; -enhancing cross-border regional cooperation between companies. Research and technological development: Both the JRC and the Research DG of the Commission carried out several activities relevant to the Northern dimension recently. Special attention was paid to Arctic themes, soil protection and mapping, forest monitoring and natural resources. The 6th Framework Programme for RTD foresees specific measures in support of international cooperation, including with Russia and the Candidate countries. Justice and Home Affairs: Russia, Poland and the Baltic States all face the fight against organised crime, terrorism, trafficking in women and drugs. The control of external frontiers and

respect for international norms in the fields of asylum and immigration brings an added dimension. The Russian Oblast of Kalingrad presents particular challenges. Some 50% of the region's population live below the poverty line with real unemployment being an average 25% across the Oblast. The region's military status plays a key role in Kalingrad's situation. Kalingrad is facing a number of serious security problems that should be urgently addressed. More attention is being paid to migration issues and to the financing of border crossings at the frontier of the enlarged EU. The most important JHA progress in the area is taking place in the candidate countries, including their integration into the international judicial cooperation regime. Cross-border cooperation: The development of zones of economic integration is of particular interest for the Baltic Sea Region. The report concludes that much remains to be done. It is important to strengthen the coordination and the synergies between the EU's and other actors' projects.