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

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The European Parliament adopted the resolution by Marjo Matikainen-Kallström (PPE,FI) on the Communication from the Commission - A Northern Dimension for the policies of the Union. The report urges the Commission to make all the requisite measures compatible with existing instruments and policies in an effective manner so that the long-term objectives of the Northern Dimension are attained. It also urges the Commission to participate in the work of the Arctic Council. The Parliament calls on the Commission to update, as necessary, relevant Accession Partnerships to take the Northern Dimension into account. Stressing that the special conditions in the northern regions should be taken into account in developing the EU's policies in connection with the reform of the Structural Funds, the Parliament wishes to see priority given to inter-regional and cross-border cooperation. It considers that the Interreg, PHARE and TACIS programmes could be used to enhance the Baltic programme included in the budget for 1999. Equally, the Parliament calls on the Commission to promote, under the Fifth Framework Programme, research studies with relevance to the Northern Dimension on the environment and health, sustainable forestry and a sustainable forestry industry, climate change and biodiversity, marine research, utilisation of remote sensing methods, telematic applications for sparsely populated areas, nuclear safety and cleaner energy generation. Considering that initial actions under the Northern Dimension can be funded through existing EU budget lines, the Parliament calls on the Commission to continue funding the project for the processing and disposal of intermediate-level and low-level nuclear wastes in the Kola Peninsula as well as to continue supporting financially and technically the decommissioning of the Ignalina nuclear power station in Lithuania and to investigate the possibility of decommissioning the Sosnovvi Bar nuclear power station in Russia. The report calls for the provision of aid for the removal of abandoned military installations and the rehabilitation of the land thereby released. It underlines that financing for the priority areas of the Northern Dimension should involve private sector investments as well as international financial institutions such as the IBRD, the EIB, the EBRD and the Nordic Investment Bank and that EU funds should be increasingly earmarked for long-term investment-related projects and feasability studies. The Parliament calls on the Commission to devise a comprehensive plan to fight organised crime in this area in time for the Tampere summit in October 1999 and equally calls for the development of cooperation with the authorities of Russia and other Baltic Sea Region States on matters falling within the scope of the third pillar (especially drug trafficking and money laundering). The report also calls for negotiations between the EU and Russia regarding the sometimes inexplicable and immense problems of customs duties and border crossings and urges the Commission to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the people of North-Western Russia. With regard to energy, the Parliament supports an extension tothe Baltic of the Nordic electricity grid. With regard to Union internal policy, it wishes the Commission's Inter-Service Task Force for the Northern Dimension to start operating as soon as possible, under the direction of a single Commissioner and endowed with adequate resources for it to fulfil its role of coordination and management. Finally, the Parliament calls on both the Council and the Commission to make careful preparations for the conference on the Northern Dimension to be held in November, paving the way for a subsequent "Northern Summit", to be attended by all countries encompassed within the Northern Dimension, including Canada and the United States.