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

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PURPOSE : To present the priorities for the second Northern Dimension Action Plan, 2004-2006. CONTENT : First established through an EU initiative in 2000 the initial Northern Dimension Action Plan will expire at the end of 2003. Thanks to the success of the Action Plan the European Commission has prepared the Second Northern Dimension Action Plan to cover the years 2004-2006. The geographic area covered by the Plan stretches from the Arctic and sub-Arctic to the southern shores of the Baltic and from Northwest Russia in the East to Iceland and Greenland in the west. The key purpose of the Action Plan is to provide a clear operational framework for all Northern Dimension stakeholders by setting strategic objectives, priorities and concrete activities. For it to be successful it requires the strong participation of all partners namely, the EU Member States, partner countries, regional bodies, civil society, the business world and research institutions. The effect of EU enlargement in 2004 will add to the need for enhanced co-operation and co-ordination. The Present Action Plan establishes five broad priority sectors: 1. The economy, business and infrastructure. Under this heading the Action Plan hopes to encourage and facilitate a favourable business climate through, for example, the removal of technical barriers to trade and investment. Other measure will include support for economic reforms and regulatory convergence in Russia. SME's will also be singled out for specific backing. Practical measures to facilitate trade will include improved border management to allow for reduced clearance time at border crossings. This heading also covers aspects such as the co-ordination of energy production and supply. Practical measures include, inter alia, the implementation of the North European Gas Pipeline, which is part of the EU TEN-E priorities. In terms of infrastructure the future activities in this filed will address bottlenecks and choke point in the Northern Dimension region. The basis for work will be provided by the Commission revision of the Guidelines for Tans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and the Commission White Paper on the "European transport Policy for 2010" Improving telecommunications and the promotion of the information society are also seen as vital to promoting a more co-ordinated economy. 2. Human resources, education scientific research and health The main thrust of these priorities will include the promotion of a "knowledge-based" region, to improve communication and information exchange in the scientific community in Russia and to address the challenges linked to the fight against major communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Practical support for the latter point includes, for example the implementation of some 400 projects between 2004-2006 through the NCM Action Plan for Children and Youth in 3 Baltic Countries and Russia, to improve the health of children, particularly street/prison children. Funding is provided by the central and local authorities and partner NGO's 3. The Environment, Nuclear Safety and Natural Resources A lot of work and monitoring needs to be conducted under these headings. The main activities will focus on strengthening the EU-Russia dialogue on environmental issues as well as monitoring pollutants throughout the region. Measures will include activities such as the continued implementation of projectsfinanced in the framework of EU programmes such as Tacis, LIFE and INTERREG. Concerning nuclear safety, the Action Plan will implement projects included in the Nuclear Window of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership Support Fund. 4. Cross-Border Co-operation The priority will be to implement cross-border co-operation initiatives principally on economic and social development, environmental protection, transport and telecommunications, border crossings and border management, public health exchanges and cultural exchanges. 5. Justice and Home Affairs. With organised crime and immigration perceived as a real threat to the EU's internal security improved co-ordination in the field of Justice and Home Affairs is considered a must. The intention therefore is to improve co-ordination among national administrations and

police forces to develop concrete operational measures between the EU and Russia and thereby increase the effectiveness of law enforcement co-operation. The Action Plan also takes account of the unique needs of both Kaliningrad and the Arctic Regions when implementing the priorities outlined above.