

**INTERNATIONAL NORTHERN eDIMENSION FORUM  
PORI, NOVEMBER 11-12, 2002**

**Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen**

The Danish Presidency of the European Union has been very determined in its efforts to promote the Northern Dimension. Concrete progress has been achieved under the pragmatic and result oriented leadership of Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

The guidelines for the new Action Plan of the Northern Dimension were agreed just three weeks ago at the Ministerial meeting in Luxembourg. As the next step, the Copenhagen European Council in December will invite the European Commission to draft a new Action Plan for the years 2004-2006.

Finland commends the work of the Danish Presidency and the European Commission in preparing the guidelines. The Luxembourg guidelines contain all the elements for the new Action Plan. The approach is broad and horizontal and provides a good basis for our future work.

The leading role of the Commission in the preparation of the Action Plan and in the implementation of the Northern Dimension policy was clearly confirmed at the meeting in Luxembourg. The active engagement of the Commission guarantees best that the Northern Dimension is a common policy of the whole Union and the partner countries.

The Baltic Sea region is already a very dynamic growth centre. The enlargement of the Union will act as a catalyst in this process.

The European Council in Copenhagen will invite 10 countries to become members of the European Union. The enlargement of the Union and the development of EU-Russia relations will bring opportunities to the whole Baltic Sea Region. The Northern Dimension is a functioning instrument in tackling common challenges in the future.

The Luxembourg meeting put special emphasis on trade, investment promotion and business cooperation. Further efforts must be made to remove technical and other barriers to trade and investments and to promote equal competition among economic actors. Special consideration must be given to small and medium size enterprises.

In the Northern Dimension we need to improve the financing facility by extending the EIB's mandate to finance transport infrastructure in Russia. For trade relations in this region, Russia's membership of WTO will be of vital importance.

We also need to further develop border crossing facilities between the enlarged Union and Russia. The fight against organised crime and corruption must continue.

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The environmental sector remains a key area in the Northern Dimension. The establishment of the Fund for the Environmental Partnership Programme (NDEP) last July was a breakthrough.

We have now an operational tool to strengthen environmental cooperation in the region. I hope that more countries will support the Fund and that projects will be started.

At our last Northern Dimension Forum in Joensuu in September we agreed to develop a Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Wellbeing. Implementation of this initiative has already started. I am especially pleased that Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik has promised to host a follow-up conference in Norway next year.

Arctic concerns are well integrated in the Luxembourg guidelines. The environmental problems of the Arctic have global relevance and are a concern for the whole European Union. Another vital issue is the ICT sector. The Arctic digital divide is a reality. ICT can make a vital contribution to sustainable development and wellbeing in the Arctic.

The University of the Arctic - the University without walls - is an excellent example of an ambitious initiative which has been implemented in broad cooperation of all relevant actors in the Arctic.

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The development of the information society is one of the priorities in the Northern Dimension. It is also an important objective in the Baltic Sea cooperation. Finland - as a Chairman of the Council of the Baltic Sea States - will pay due attention to the development of the ICT sector.

In the Baltic Sea region a number of countries are advanced in the production and use of information and telecommunication technology. However, there is a need for the promotion of coordinated initiatives and increased commitment from all parties in the region. The whole area, including Russia, will benefit from intensified cooperation.

The Northern eDimension Action Plan (NeDAP) was adopted by the IT ministers of the Baltic Sea states in Riga in September 2001. The NeDAP is at the same time a regional initiative and a part of the EU's external relations. The Action Plan builds upon the eEurope and eEurope+ action plan as well as national and regional action plans.

The NeDAP is a good example of how the active involvement of the European Commission can lead to tangible results. At the first international Forum on the Northern Dimension in Lappeenranta two years ago, Commissioner Erkki Liikanen confirmed the engagement of the Commission in the implementation of the NeDAP, and informed that 12 million euro would be earmarked for concrete projects.

I want to thank Commissioner Liikanen for his personal engagement in promoting the Northern eDimension.

The aim of the NeDAP is to accelerate the transition to a knowledge-based information society, in all countries of the region. Improved ICT cooperation can often be a precondition for long-term success in other sectors of cooperation especially in the Baltic Sea region.

The implementation of the NeDAP has already started with six different projects. Finland has taken on a special responsibility by acting - together with Germany - as the lead country for eSkills. ICT skills are of vital importance in the process. The goal is to adapt education and labour market systems to the requirements of the knowledge-based economy.

I sincerely hope that all Baltic Sea states and other parties such as the Commission and the Nordic Council of Ministers will see this as a common challenge and be ready to work together to achieve results.

I am pleased that positive action is taking place within the framework of the NeDAP. The Action Plan is monitored by the national Senior Officials of the Information Society (SOIS) who will meet here in Pori.

I want to thank Sweden for its leadership in chairing the Senior Officials during the first year. I also wish success to Latvia which will take over the chairmanship for the coming year. I am confident that the NeDAP will make a vital contribution in accelerating development and will serve as an effective tool for enhancing the information society in this region.

Finland is strongly committed to the enhancement of the information society and to the implementation of the Northern eDimension Action Plan. Through our Neighbouring Area Cooperation Programme we have supported concrete projects in the region.

Finland has cooperated with Lithuania and the Commission in the development of the Northern Dimension Portal. This Portal will cover all the work that has been done within the Northern Dimension Action Plan. It will be maintained by Lithuania and it will complement the Commission's existing home pages.

The Northern Dimension Portal will be opened for public use today here in Pori. More visibility is really needed for the Northern Dimension. I am convinced that the Portal will increase awareness of the Northern Dimension.

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When I launched the Northern Dimension Initiative five years ago in Rovaniemi - in September 1997- I stressed the importance of research and education in the Northern regions.

Now, I am pleased to note that these questions are well covered in the guidelines of the Luxembourg Ministerial meeting. The next Action Plan should promote the sharing of experience in utilizing the scientific potential in the region. The enlarged Union should also use the opportunities to cooperate more with Russian universities and academic institutions.

We need to intensify exchange of students and researchers. The next Action Plan should recognise the need to analyse the rapid social, political, economic, technical and environmental changes that occur in the Northern Dimension area. The possibilities of the EU's Framework Programmes to finance research programmes in Northern Europe should also be strengthened.

I fully support ideas to create an international Northern Dimension Academic Network to stimulate academic discussion about the challenges in the North and to identify important research areas. I believe that networking is the best way to look for financial tools for larger joint research programmes and projects.

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These Northern Dimension Fora have become a real success. Six Fora held so far have gathered more than 1600 participants. For example, in the last Forum in Joensuu in September, one hundred of four hundred participants were Russian experts. Today here in Pori we have an exceptionally broad participation from all countries in the Northern Dimension area.

And the work continues. At least two Northern Dimension Fora will be organised next year in Finland. Labour market questions will be discussed in Helsinki in February and transport, infrastructure and logistics in Kotka next autumn. Further more, an International Forum is under preparation to be held in Nordrhein-Westfalen in Germany also during next year. I was also informed that a follow-up conference for the Northern eDimension is planned to be organised in Saint Petersburg next autumn as a part of the city's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

I want to thank Chairman of the Northern Dimension Forum, Rector Esko Riepula and his whole group for excellent work done during this year. I also want especially to thank Mr Martti Sinisalmi, Mayor of Pori and Mr Pekka Takala, Director of Sonera and all other people who have organised this Pori Forum.

I wish every success to this forum here in Pori.