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Guidelines for the Nordic Council of Minister's cooperation with Northwest Russia 2006-2008.

Since the mid 1990s the Nordic Council of Ministers and Russia have developed their cooperation in Northwest Russia. The current Framework Programme expires at the turn of the year 2005/2006.

The present guidelines should be seen as the Nordic Council of Ministers' contribution to move cooperation forward and they will partially take effect already as of 2005.

1. Why cooperate?

Throughout the times, the Nordic countries have throughout the times entertained relations with Russia. The motives for such cooperative relations have evolved over the years. Today, there is a wish for wider-ranging cooperation focusing on **democratic societal development, open pluralistic relations** across borders and a **regulated market economy**. The Nordic Council of Ministers attaches vital importance to such aspects as:

- A **democratic development of society** presupposes that constant attention is given to fundamental human rights and principles of the rule of law, as a precondition for citizens' dialogue and necessary participation in socio-political life. Well-functioning, independent societal structures are crucial for free opinion-shaping and empowerment by citizens of society;
- Experience has shown that **extensive and diverse cross-border contacts** at all levels are crucial to ensuring mutual understanding between neighbouring nations which, in turn, forms the basis for stability and secure conditions for development, both regionally and in a broader international perspective;
- A **regulated development of the market economy** can counterbalance the benefits of free entrepreneurship for individuals and enterprises by providing common regard for the fundamental conditions of economic life. In this respect, judicial as well as physical infrastructures, principles for sustainable development, as well as considerations of welfare distribution are of vital importance.

Broader cooperation will be based on sustainable development. Sustainable development represents a strong common commitment and is a field where the Nordic countries occupy a leading position. The new Nordic cross-sectoral strategy for sustainable development reconciles environmental, economic and social issues that could prove particularly useful in this specific area.

Cooperation gains particular significance in view of the fact that Russia is the Nordic region's, but also the EU's largest neighbour. Hence, developments in Russia also impact the Nordic region and the EU, not least for **security reasons** in the broadest sense of the term.

The **Baltic Sea region** has the potential of becoming a leading growth region in Europe. In this region, Northwest Russia and St. Petersburg, in particular, are of utmost importance. Moreover, with its distinct geographical location, Kaliningrad holds special interest.

All countries around the Baltic sea have a responsibility for and an interest in **protecting these waters**, not only as an important economic traffic artery, but also as a cultural legacy, tourist area and marine environment.

In these areas of **common interests**, the Nordic region wishes to serve as a partner in a positive dialogue with Russia. **The aim of joint Nordic cooperation is to foster developments in Russia capable of laying the foundations for stronger neighbourly relations resulting in security and development for all of Northern Europe.**

Today, the Nordic Council of Ministers and Russian regions in the Northwest engage in extensive cooperative activities aimed at achieving this objective. The Nordic Council of Ministers will continue to further this cooperation.

2. How to cooperate?

As far as the Nordic countries are concerned, the cooperation described here is the **multilateral cooperation engaged in between national states**, where the Nordic countries jointly cooperate within the framework of the Nordic Council of Ministers with **certain parts of Northwest Russia**. The activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers should be regarded as a complement to the Nordic countries' bilateral cooperation with Northwest Russia and in compliance with the principles jointly laid down by the countries involved.

Experiences gained so far demonstrate that there is a need for a **clearer structuralisation** of joint Nordic cooperation with Russia.

2005 is a transition year, which means that the special **Adjacent Area Programme**, based on the **2003-2005 Framework Programme**, will be brought to an end and replaced by new cooperation starting up in 2006. The aim is that the financial means available for such cooperation will be somewhat increased in the coming years.

Nordic cooperation ministers, including the Nordic Committee for Cooperation, will draw up the Nordic Council of Ministers' guidelines for cooperation, and hence they have *overriding* responsibility for coordinating the specific content of such cooperation. In future, cooperation will be carried out within the framework of the **Russia Programme**, which includes the activities of the various sectoral ministerial councils. The Programme will have a special budget at its disposal to reinforce the activities of sectoral ministers.

Future cooperation with Northwest Russia will be **evaluated** on a continuous basis – **by cooperation ministers, as well as by the secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers**. To this end, the individual sectoral council will prepare an **annual status report** on cooperation. The reports will describe the specific cooperative projects that have been carried out, provide an evaluation of the extent to which the guidelines of the cooperation ministers

have been followed and whether the political priorities in force at any given time have been fulfilled. They will also contain a description and evaluation of cooperative activities planned for the coming years. The reports will form the basis of a more general annual discussion of principle among Nordic cooperation ministers of such cooperation and its development in the future. In addition to the political evaluation, cooperation will be assessed by external professional evaluators.

The aim is to reach, together with Russia, a **model for future cooperation** where each of the parties finances their share of cooperation. Hence, future project cooperation will be based on **equal partnerships** where proposals for activities are to be presented by both sides, planning is to be conducted jointly and where there is mutual agreement about financing solutions. Activities will be politically anchored with all parties involved in order to ensure ownership and follow-up. Nordic initiatives for cooperative activities will be presented via the Nordic sectoral ministerial councils/committees of senior officials.

In addition to initiatives launched by the Nordic ministerial councils, efforts will be made to accommodate cooperative projects proposed by NGOs, local authorities and other players. The Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in St. Petersburg and the future office in Kaliningrad will serve as consultative bodies for these types of inquiry.

Nordic cooperation ministers have at their disposal a **reserve for political initiatives** under the annual budget for cooperation with relevant neighbouring countries. These funds will be used for special measures of current political interest.

The Nordic Council of Ministers activity should be **rendered more visible**, so as to arouse greater interest with Russian authorities aimed at further developing cooperation. This is a task to be shared with the Nordic Information Office in Northwest Russia, as well as by its secretariat.

3. Areas of cooperation

Common objectives should form the basis for joint Nordic-Russian cooperation within the individual sectoral ministerial council, and such objectives should be updated annually.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' cooperation with Northwest Russia operates in relation to the **EU framework** for cooperation with Russia, including the development of EU's Neighbourhood Programme, the Northern Dimension, the "Four Common Spaces", as well as the bilateral cooperation agreement between the EU and the Russian Federation.

In their cooperation with Northwest Russia, the Nordic countries will, as far as possible, strive to achieve the appropriate coordination with the **2nd Action Plan of the Northern Dimension (NDAPII)**.

Joint Nordic-Russian cooperation must **represent added value**, by comparison with bilateral cooperation and EU cooperation. The common denominators of Russian and Nordic needs and interests must be identified. It is important to ensure that cooperation does not deal with tasks that should logically be covered under the Russian Federation's national budget.

It would be natural to **build on** already established cooperation that has proven successful and where there is a mutual interest in its further development. The principles of gender equality will occupy a central position and will be integrated into further cooperation.

Efforts **promoting Nordic interests** are a benefit for all Nordic countries. Particularly valuable in this context is well-developed cooperation in the field of culture, as culture may serve as a lever for other forms of cooperation. Activities promoting the Nordic region also include incentives for Nordic business start-ups in Northwest Russia.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has a particular interest in developing cooperation in certain **key areas**, including:

- Democracy development and strengthening of the constitutional state;
- IT cooperation could be developed in terms of content and technology. The areas of application of – and the need for – broad IT solutions in the Baltic Sea region are vast.
- Regional cross-border cooperation, both bilaterally between the Nordic countries and Northwest Russia, as well as tripartite cooperation between the Baltic states, Nordic countries and Russia will have an important role to play. By building on past experiences, cooperation may be further developed, e.g. with Belarus;
- Research and innovation work, as well as cooperation in the field of education would provide natural continuity in the context of cooperation that has already been initiated and that is vital to the attractive force of the entire region.
- Social and health issues, including the fight against drugs and safeguarding the interests and needs of children and young people, particularly within the “Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-Being”.
- Environment and sustainable development.

In this connection, it is worth mentioning that regional cross-border cooperation may also be used as an instrument in the context of cooperation on social and health issues and on environment and sustainable development.

4. Which geographical area does cooperation cover?

As from 2006, cooperation will primarily cover those parts of Northwest Russia with a natural border – either on land or at sea – with either a Nordic or Baltic country: **Murmansk** oblast, Republic of **Karelia**, **Leningrad** oblast, **Pskov** oblast, **St. Petersburg** and **Kaliningrad**.

St. Petersburg is of obvious interest to the Nordic countries as the centre of Northwest Russia and the **key** to the future of the entire Baltic Sea region. Kaliningrad occupies a special position as the enclave gradually becomes a more integrated part of the Baltic Sea region. The needs for cooperation are considerable, at the same time as Kaliningrad’s development is of great significance, both for Kaliningrad itself and its neighbours Lithuania and Poland. These factors speak in favour of more active involvement on the part of ministerial councils in this part of Northwest Russia, especially following the opening of an office in Kaliningrad.

This geographical definition of geographical areas of cooperation may be revised on an ongoing basis by the cooperation ministers.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' efforts must be coordinated more clearly than in the past with **other regional organisations**, such as the Baltic Sea Council, Barents Council, Barents Regional Council and Arctic Council. In Arctic regions, cooperation has for many years been practised in such a way that the Nordic Council of Ministers, in collaboration with the Arctic Council, finances activities focussing on the environment and/or indigenous peoples.

In the coming years the Nordic Council of Ministers will give priority to projects in the Arctic and Barents regions that are being carried out in cooperation with the above-stated regional bodies. In collaboration with the various organisations, consensus in the strategies of these organisations will be aimed for, and the distinctive strong points of the respective organisations will be safeguarded. This provides an opportunity for implementing particularly valuable cooperative activities in Arkhangelsk oblast.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' participation in cooperation with other regional organisations is based on separate, overriding guidelines for such activities, adopted by cooperation ministers on the co-financing of activities. **Consultations** between the organisations involved will take place on a regular basis.

Current cooperative relations with Russia are **well-established at regional level**. Each regional administration (oblast/republic/St. Petersburg city) has committees for their respective sectors, health, environment, etc. However, the committee for international affairs (in the respective republics, oblasts and St. Petersburg) should primarily serve as the Nordic Council of Ministers' contact point when relations are to be established and/or extended, as these committees possess the general overview of the region's international and bilateral cooperation with the Nordic region. However, this will not be sufficient, and it is expected that Nordic committees of senior officials, working groups and similar bodies establish contacts with the relevant sectoral committees in the individual areas, with the assistance of the Nordic Council of Ministers' offices in Northwest Russia.

In addition to cooperation with regional authorities, there is also a need for better-defined relations with **federal Russian authorities**. As an initial measure, it has been agreed that the secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers' will keep the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Copenhagen posted on activities at a general level, with a particular focus on future meetings of ministers and senior officials involving Russian participants. As for sector-specific reporting to the competent ministries in Moscow, this is a responsibility to be assumed by the Russian partners. The Committee of Experts will be replaced by regular consultations.

5. Forms of cooperation

The different forms of joint Nordic-Russian cooperation may vary, but will at all times be based on the cooperation ministers' political priorities. Cooperation will be based on specific activities of common interest within priority areas, and the programme will not involve investment projects or general operating funds for public or private institutions, organisations or enterprises.

A **long-term perspective** is crucial to achieving sustainable results. This long-term approach will be primarily based on the involvement of Russian partners, as the level of Nordic financing will be decided on a year-by-year basis.

Appropriate instruments for achieving the specific forms of cooperation are, among others:

- Exchange programmes are efficient with a view to building interpersonal relations. Such programmes would be relevant in a number of important areas.
- Joint initiatives that may form the basis for promoting projects of particular developmental value and thereby serve as “path-finders”.
- Exchange of experience and information could provide mutual benefit as part of a necessary benchmarking process.
- Use of so-called “seed money” for the start-up of activities that are expected to be of particular spread value.

6. Nordic Council of Ministers’ offices in Northwest Russia

The **Nordic Information Office in St. Petersburg** has played a **pivotal role** in the development of the many technical networks that have been built up over the years between Nordic and Russian partners. The Nordic Information Office in St. Petersburg and information points in the regions occupy a key position in identifying the relevant Russian players for the various activities. A new office in Kaliningrad will be attributed the same functions.

Today, the office is often the implementing party of Nordic involvement in various cooperative activities, as the office:

- constitutes the local **contact point** for Nordic sectoral ministerial councils, their committees and working groups, e.g. by identifying the relevant Russian partners and thereby facilitating cooperation;
- develops **networks** with national authorities, NGOs and other national and international players in the Russian regions;
- serves as the Council of Ministers’ local **observer**, identifying trends and opportunities for joint Nordic-Russian cooperation. This is a task that cannot exclusively be carried out at a distance;
- serves as an exponent for all that is “**Nordic**” and work to increase attention to cooperation, especially in the field of culture;
- possesses considerable **competence** that could also be useful for the sectoral ministers’ further development of cooperation with the Russian regions;
- carries out the **practical case handling, quality assurance**, etc. of exchange programmes and other schemes in a more efficient manner than would otherwise have been possible.

These tasks will be continued in the future.

As in the past, the office will continue to have a **small budget** at its disposal for locally initiated cooperation in compliance with the Nordic Council of Ministers' guidelines.

Networking will gain increased importance, also between the **offices of the Nordic Council of Ministers**. The offices in the Baltic states possess considerable competence that would be of great use to the offices in Northwest Russia for the further development of cooperation with the Russian regions.

The office makes up part of the Nordic Council of Ministers' secretariat and its executive **reports** directly to the Secretary General. Contacts between the office and the secretariat in Copenhagen will be expanded. Its name will be shortened to the "Nordic Council of Ministers' office in St. Petersburg".

A **new office** will be opened in Kaliningrad. The overall office capacity in Northwest Russian will be reinforced in order to manage the new tasks ahead. The different offices may be attributed different tasks, depending on local needs.

7. Institutional cooperation

Several of the Nordic Council of Ministers' sectoral institutions are active in Northwest Russia. The remaining activities of these institutions and of the Council of Ministers will be coordinated by means of **consultations and annual reporting**.