

Statement by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the third Ministerial meeting of the Northern Dimension

Brussels, 18 February 2013

Dear Chairperson,

Dear colleagues,

At the outset I would like to thank our hosts for their hospitality.

Eight years have been enough for the Northern Dimension policy, renewed on the basis of equal participation of four partners and co-funding of negotiated projects, to prove its benefits both for the citizens of our countries and for maintaining the climate of trust and cooperation in the region.

The Northern Dimension is a platform for accumulating potentials of regional strategies and plans of the four partners, including the Strategy of Social and Economic Development of the Northwestern District of the Russian Federation until 2020 and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The strategy of comprehensive development of the Northwestern District – precisely the one covered by the Northern Dimension – was adopted by the Government of the Russian Federation in November 2011. It encompasses all spheres of life in the district – from mechanical engineering, research and innovations to migration policy, cross-border cooperation and external economic activities. Special emphasis is given to energy efficiency, social development, enhancing well-being of the population and environmental protection. The very geographical position of the Northwestern part of Russia predetermines its active involvement in ensuring Russia's economic ties with the European Union and other foreign partners. The Government of the Russian Federation will welcome further steps under the ND Partnerships contributing to achieving the goals set in the Strategy, including in the context of the Russia-EU Partnership for Modernisation.

Today it would be particularly important to focus on identifying tasks and problems common to Russia, other partners and the EU that we could resolve together relying on resources of the Russian strategy and the Baltic Strategy of the EU. Our experts are already considering first project ideas to be implemented jointly in the Baltic Sea region.

Being an internal document of the Russian Federation, the Strategy has implications for participation of Russian regions not only in the Northern Dimension, but also in the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and Russia-EU cross-border cooperation programmes. I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our willingness to continue cross-border cooperation programmes until 2020 on the basis of equal partnership and co-funding.

Dear colleagues,

The presence of many partners in the region covered by the Northern Dimension whose individual contribution is, no doubt, enriching the already quite dense network of regional cooperation, requires a systemic vision of how this collaboration should be organised. In this context, we welcome the instruction contained in the draft Joint Statement of our meeting to intensify work on promoting such a comprehensive approach.

We should consider where, in the long run, overarching cooperation between regional actors can bring significant added value.

At the same time, we should not forget that not only subregional, but also pan-European organisations are active in the European North. Let me mention in this regard the Hansa and the Viking Cultural Routes adopted by the Council of Europe and covering most countries on the continent, as well as our cooperation on other tracks. We suggest further developing joint projects in these difficult times for the European economy.

Keeping cooperation in the Northern Europe in all its formats away from politics is of major importance. So far, we have not always succeeded in that. In particular, we should implement our common decision adopted more than two years ago on granting Minsk an observer status in the Northern Dimension and expanding cooperation with our Belorussian neighbours along the lines of ND Partnerships.

Today we will have a substantial discussion on each of these Partnerships. The Russian Federation is interested in their effective development. We will contribute to consistent advancement towards our common goals and be engaged in settling the problems that arise. I am confident that the ND Business Council will also contribute to that. Its next session is scheduled for 4 April 2013 in Saint-Petersburg.

In the nearest future, we want to give increased attention to expanding the scope of the ND Institute and ensuring greater involvement of Russian universities in its work. Perhaps, over time, the Institute will expand into a new ND Partnership in order to facilitate innovative development of the North. Simultaneously, we consider important strengthening the research activities of the ND Institute. For instance, we could think of developing trade and economic ties in the region in the context of Russia's WTO membership and reviewing the experience collected in the field of PPP.

Being actively involved in cooperation in the European North, we do not see any irresolvable controversies or all the more issues that could require a military solution or presence of military and political blocs in the region. It could jeopardise the current pattern of constructive cooperation between states.

Europe has long ago grown to be "ripe" to develop a new architecture – an equal-based, non-bloc and transparent one, based on the principles of indivisible and comprehensive security and commitment to international law. The Northern region of our continent could well contribute to or even serve as an example of achieving this goal which would help us better use the significant potential of regional integration. In fact, collaboration within the Northern Dimension, the Arctic Council, BEAC and CBSS is itself a modern confidence-building measure bringing an additional element of stability and a practical answer to at times alarming predictions of "inevitable" conflicts in the High North. We should further strengthen and develop cooperation by enhancing cohesion and coordination between the existing mechanisms.

Furthermore, we believe that within these mechanisms more attention should be given to search for common approaches to countering radicalism, xenophobia and ultra-right extremism, to promotion of tolerance and ensuring respect for human rights in accordance with universal and pan-European conventions, which will contribute to further strengthening trust and creating additional conditions for successful implementation of joint projects in the North to the benefit, above all, of our people.

Thank you.