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SPEAKING POINTS

Ministers, Excellencies,

- My first words pay tribute to Finland for the impressive achievements during its BEAC Presidency. Let me also congratulate the whole Barents Cooperation family with the signature of the Agreement establishing the International Barents Secretariat in Kirkenes. The setting up of this Secretariat demonstrates the development and consolidation of Barents Cooperation, both at intergovernmental and interregional level. BEAC continues to adapt to the new circumstances, focusing on cross-border and sub-state cooperation, fighting environmental hotspots and improving rescue and emergency capabilities. It is a solid bridge between the northernmost regions of the European Union and those of Russia and Norway.

- The European Commission has issued or is to release a series of strategic documents and proposals with a broad impact in areas like maritime management, fisheries, sustainable development, environment protection, transport and energy security. These steps include the Maritime Policy Package, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and the widely disseminated proposals of

the Commission in the area of reducing the emission of greenhouse gases as well as the integrated climate and energy policy. It is our expectation that these measures will give additional orientation and impetus to our regional cooperation efforts. As you know, the European Union is a world leader in the fight against climate change and it is particularly concerned with the effects of global warming in the High North. We call therefore for uniting our efforts in the north of Europe, keeping at the same time a world-wide perspective. The Barents Region, being the Arctic region with the largest population, can be transformed into an area of global reference on how to fight climate change and mitigate its effects.

- Security and stability are also high on the European Union's agenda. Barents Cooperation has been remarkably efficient by focusing on the specific field of Civil Protection and Rescue Cooperation as well as the fight against organised crime. The Commission has contributed to this cooperation by providing input based on its own cross-border experience.
- Promoting human development of indigenous peoples and the protection of their culture is a world-wide cross-cutting policy of the EU. We will continue to encourage the indigenous peoples of the Barents Region to participate in European Union schemes, benefiting from our financial support. Let me add that cross-border cooperation can effectively support human development in general by establishing networks across frontiers and promoting mobility among the youth and students.
- The European Union has held up for many years cross-border cooperation and will continue to do so in the future. This involves both EU internal and external policies and their respective financial instruments. Early this year we have launched a series of new external financial instruments that will support our action at least until 2013. Notably, the European

Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and its reinforced cross-border envelope will be particularly well suited to serve regional cooperation in the North of Europe.

Ministers, Excellencies,

- The European Commission notes with satisfaction that Barents cooperation is well in line with the new Northern Dimension policy, which became operational in January this year. At our meeting we are discussing steps to enhance our cooperation in the field of economic development (including infrastructure), environment (including climate change), human and social development, indigenous peoples' protection and security and stability (including civil protection coordination across borders). These are all priority or cross-cutting sectors in the Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document. On the other hand, the Northern Dimension Framework Policy Document states for the first time that the Barents Region is a geographical priority area in the Northern Dimension Policy.
- The two current Northern Dimension Partnerships also have direct relevance for the Barents Region. The nuclear envelope of the Environmental Partnership finances projects to clean up nuclear waste in the Kola Peninsula. The Partnership's non-earmarked envelope in its turn supports environmental infrastructure projects for the benefit of towns at the Barents coast or in the catchments areas of the tributaries to the Barents Sea. The European Union is proud to be the leading contributor to the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership and will continue to support it in the future, along with Russia and all other donors. There are still many environmental hotspots in the Barents Region that require our attention and will need coordinated efforts from all actors.

- The Northern Dimension Partnership on Health and Social Well-Being is also important for the Barents Region, because of its specific geographical and climate conditions and scarce population.
- The possibility of creating new Northern Dimension partnerships has attracted a lot of attention and could be of great importance for the Barents Region. This is of course in the hands of the Northern Dimension structures. As far as the Commission is concerned, we would be ready to have a positive look at these proposals, provided they are based on solid technical and financial ground and rely on the full engagement of Russia and the International Financial Institutions.

The new Northern Dimension enhances the role of the Regional Councils and we look forward to BEAC's active involvement in Northern Dimension activities. In six days, the first Senior Officials' Meeting of the new Northern Dimension policy will meet in St. Petersburg. The Northern Dimension also advocates for synergies in the North. Let me use also this occasion to call for further developing the coordination between the four Regional Councils. The new Northern Dimension offers improved possibilities for synergies between them. As we see, there is growing readiness for cooperation and specialisation in all northern councils, and some of them have put forward far-reaching initiatives, pointing in this direction.

Finally, let me wish all the best to the incoming Russian Presidency and to Ambassador Ignatiev, the first Head of the International Barents Secretariat. Thanks a lot, Minister Kanerva for your hospitality, for the excellent organisation of this meeting.

Thank you very much