

Mr Chairman, Ministers, your Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends,

it is a pleasure to take part in the 5th Annual International Conference on Cross-border cooperation on behalf of the Icelandic Chairmanship of the Nordic Council of Ministers. I am glad that the Nordic Council of Ministers also this year is among the co-organisers and supporters of the conference.

Today many countries are struggling in face of a deepening financial and social crisis, the consequences of climate change and other problems, many of which need immediate action. These and other important challenges can be addressed through effective and practical international and cross-border cooperation. The Nordic Council of Ministers, the official cooperation between the governments of the five Nordic countries, works actively to support and carry out cross-border cooperation, to facilitate the resolution of related problems and promote the development of an effective course of action. The Nordic Council of Ministers has instigated, supported and is taking part in a vast number of cross-border initiatives, to address the unique challenges and advance opportunities which are present in the Baltic Sea region. The Nordic Council of Ministers believes that cooperation across the borders in the Baltic Sea region can create synergies and help develop the region into 'the top of Europe' – a strong and prosperous region ready to meet

the challenges of globalisation. The Nordic Council of Ministers strives for a continuous development of practical cross-border cooperation and instruments that facilitate it through practical programmes such as the Knowledge Building and Networking Programme and the NGO-programme for the Baltic Sea Region, as well as the cross-border cooperation project BEN-EAST. Since 1995 the Nordic Council of Ministers has had an information office here in Saint Petersburg and in 2006 we opened an office in Kaliningrad which in itself promotes practical cooperation.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' cooperation with Northwest Russia is based on a principle of equal partnerships for mutual benefit. This is reflected in the guidelines for cooperation with Northwest Russia for the years 2009-2013, which was adopted by the Nordic Ministers for Cooperation last year as the main policy document for the cooperation.

A further important aspect of Nordic Council of Minister's cooperation with Northwest Russia is support to the implementation of the Northern Dimension. The Nordic Council of Ministers sees itself as a contributor to the fulfilment of the Northern Dimension objectives – and has therefore for example made the Northern Dimension an integral part of its policies and collaboration activities in the Baltic Sea Region and the Barents region. The Nordic Council of Ministers has actively supported the development of a possible new Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture, the establishment of which is to be decided later this autumn. We also support the implementation of concrete projects within the Partnership for Social Wellbeing and Health as well as within the Environmental Partnership. In total, the Nordic

Council of Ministers in 2007-2008 supported more than 170 projects related to the Northern Dimension.

Mr Chairman,

Let me finally add, that the necessity of cross-border cooperation is not always a sufficient condition for its success although most countries acknowledge the benefits of this cooperation in various fields. We can not always copy a mechanism of cross-border cooperation and assume its success. However, we should all take the opportunity to learn from each other, and the experiences each of us has made as well as discuss how to develop further the practical cross-border cooperation to the benefit of us all

Thank you Mr. Chairman.