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Norwegian interests, Norwegian policy in the High North

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The High North has been defined as the government's main strategic issue and the main strategic area in our foreign policy.

This may surprise – even puzzle – people. After all – Norway is a key player in international conflict prevention and peace negotiations. We have the highest percentage in the world of GNI to development cooperation and are considered a great power in the UN.

Still – our main foreign policy focus is the high north. There are both strategic, geopolitical, security and environmental reasons for that:

- The discovery of huge energy resources.
- The technological development which makes it possible to produce them.
- The activity which the energy resources will generate both on- and off-shore in a vulnerable environment.
- The research and development involved.
- The prospects of booming business development in the northern parts on Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia.
- Melting ice and consequently new shipping routes opening up as a result of climate change.
- Some of the world largest surviving fishery resources.

I might add security and defence policy, but that has so far not been a main issue in our High North strategy. But we have signed an MOU with Iceland about cooperation on civilian defence. And when the Americans left Keflavik, Norway was one of the countries to speak within the NATO Alliance for a NATO presence to replace the Americans. And the last weeks French Mirage fighters representing NATO has been in Iceland. Interesting – because it shows a new NATO attitude in France with the new president.

All this brings Norway and its Nordic neighbours together, and it brings us into contact with our Russian neighbours.

And – the High North – can once again take a prominent place on the European stage.

And Norway has increased the focus and strengthened our contact with cooperating partners in the region: Neighbouring countries, but also multilateral councils and bodies. Like the Arctic council, the Barents Council, the Baltic Council, the NATO-Russia Council.

During the cold war, during the years of the Soviet Union, the High North was a frozen region, both climatically and politically. Many considered the region to be just about fish and navy submarines. Less than 20 years ago the eyes of the international community were focused on the military tension in the north. We considered ourselves to be the most strategic country in the NATO-alliance – due to the border between us and the Soviet Union. We were actually being spoilt – in the alliance. NATO invested in infrastructure and NATO troops were training in Norway. The High North was a security centre in Europe.

Then the attention shifted elsewhere. Today, the High North is just one centre in Europe.

19 years have passed since the first East Germans broke through the Berlin wall. The young people today may ask: which wall? I was recently in Berlin, and it is unbelievable that there was once a wall through the city centre.

The new order in Europe started on the 9th November 1989. The Soviet Union collapsed like a house of cards. New states emerged. Both NATO and the EU have enlarged.

Of course – Norway's relations with Russia have fundamentally changed. Those relations have many aspects, some of them are demanding. But both Norway, Finland and Sweden have developed a unique form of cross-border and regional cooperation with Russia. 15 years of Barents cooperation has created a community of interests and opportunities for creating growth. Throughout the High North. Neighbours have grown closer. We have increased our room for manoeuvre, which makes it possible to take advantage of this community of interests.

The government's high North strategy provides important guidelines for just that.

The Nordic countries have shown a will to create new regional opportunities in the Baltic and Barents regions.

We will continue to do so.

The Norwegian idea of a cooperation zone extending over the Russian border has grown out of this tradition.

But it is also a fact that we can best manoeuvre in new political waters and currents if we keep our most central anchor points. Being part of the transatlantic community is one such vital anchor point – now as before.

Our membership in NATO and our relations with the US form our security policy guarantee. And guarantees must stand firm. Close friendships, not least with the US, must be fostered and renewed. We share the responsibility for this. For Finland and Sweden, membership of the EU is a similar anchor point. And for all of us, the cornerstones of our foreign and security policy are the UN and international law.

But even-though these anchor points stand firm, they are also changing in the face of new challenges. Membership in NATO still entails solidarity among all the members of the Alliance. There is no change here. But the perspectives on today's security challenges vary more than they used to from one member country to another.

The 196-kilometre land border between Norway and Russia is a very peaceful one. Norway has never been at war with Russia. Indeed it is the only one of Russia's neighbouring states that has not been at war with Russia at any time. And I would also like to remind you of a fact of great importance to the Norwegian people – that it was the Red Army which liberated the north of Norway in 1944, after which it withdrew. Historians have debated why this happened, but it did happen.

Since 1990, things have been changing. In 1990, approximately 3000 people crossed the border in both directions. Last year, there were more than 100 000 crossings.

Moreover, we have created – together with Russia, Finland, Sweden and the European Union – an innovative regional pattern of cooperation in the north called the Barents Cooperation. This demonstrates in an interesting way that we can work with Russia from new perspectives. Moreover the European Union has established the Northern Dimension – a semi-institutionalised cooperation, of which Norway, Iceland and Russia are full participants.

Of course – Norway and Russia are both global energy players and share interests in developing energy resources.

The Snøhvit, or Snow White, gas field was discovered in 1980, but it was not until 2000 that new technology was developed which allowed it to be explored. It has been developed without a platform. All the installations are on the seabed and the gas is taken onshore by pipeline.

Then there is the Shtokman field on the Russian shelf. It is probably the world's largest offshore gas field. But it is situated 500 kilometres north of Murmansk and will probably not enter into production until the middle of the next decade.

Meanwhile exploration continues for other geological structures in the area.

The management of energy resources, of fish and of transport – all of which Russia desperately needs for its development depends on cooperation and stability.

There are several issues in our High North strategy. We have a scientific programme called Barents 2020 to strengthen knowledge and research in the area. This includes all the Nordic countries and Russia, and a cross-border cooperation.

The research infrastructure in the region will also have to include research concerning climate change.

We invite scientists from all over the world to Svalbard to let them better understand the threats, and use the forces of the important and current political issue to draw the attention to the north.

The High North is environmentally vulnerable. Also ecologically and biologically.

Climate change effects the globe as such. But the consequences will be particularly strong in the Arctic, in the polar areas.

That is why we give such high priority to both multilateral and bilateral cooperation in the region. Important cooperating countries are Canada, Russia, Denmark/Greenland – and increasingly the US.

As parliamentarians we have given priority to talking to our American colleagues about the vulnerability of the Polar areas and the possible global consequences.

In the Arctic we have witnessed an important international cooperation. The scientists have gone from being a tool of the military presence in the Arctic to deliver important information about the Arctic environment. The indigenous peoples in the Arctic have in a successful way found their voice in sharing with the rest of the world what they think about the impacts of the global change. The indigenous people's organisations have developed partnerships with scientists. This cooperation have brought us valuable knowledge about the Arctic environment and given scientific reports new dimensions.

At the global scene of politics two of the most debated topics are climate change and natural resources. Changing climate, with the melting ice, big storms and floodings, are on everyone's lips. The world's dependence of non renewable natural resources, and the connection between the extensive use of these resources and the changing climate, is widely discussed. Climate change and the use of natural resources are the two most important topics in the Arctic cooperation. The solutions found between the Arctic countries will influence the rest of the world.

The Arctic plays a key role concerning both climate change and natural resources. The Arctic is believed to hold large parts of the world's undiscovered petroleum resources in the world, as well as large fish stocks and other natural resources, such as minerals. In the "Arctic Climate Impact Assessment" (ACIA), launched in 2004, the results of global warming in the Arctic were analyzed. The findings in this comprehensive report showed that the temperature in the Arctic is rising twice as fast as lower latitudes and reiterated that the Arctic is an early warning sign for the rest of the world with regard to climate change. Its major implications for the whole planet need to be addressed globally.

The opening of a Northern Sea Route has been discussed many times in the multilateral councils and bodies. The topic raises many important aspects; the increased marine access to the Arctic as a result of climate, commercial possibilities and environmental challenges. The prospect of routine shipping along the Northern Sea Route in summer raises important implications for the regional and global economy, for coastal communities, and for marine resources.

For Norway the living conditions for the people living in the Arctic is important. "The Arctic Human Development Report" was initiated at the Arctic Parliamentary Conference in 2000, and delivered at the Ministerial meeting in Reykjavik in 2004. This report is an important instrument in helping to remind us that there is more to the Arctic than flora, fauna and climate; people live there! We must ensure that we don't arrive at a stage where we end up knowing everything about the living conditions of the polar bear, but very little about those of the people who live in the region: The inhabitants!

The Arctic parliamentary committee has been a driving force in establishing the University of the Arctic, a virtual network for cooperation between universities in the Arctic region.

In the Arctic region we need to find ways to exploit all the rich natural resources in an environmentally sound and sustainable manner. We have to promote and invest in research, development and deployment of new technology. Thus, there is a need to establish a closer cooperation in the field of energy, with a focus on sustainable development of existing natural resources, energy efficiency and renewable energy resources.

Finally –

A part of our High North strategy is to maintain a secure and stable area by the rule of international law.

In this work we use both NATO and the UN. The rule of international law must be a basis for any activity in the north.

In terms of land Norway is the 75th largest country in the world. In terms of population we are the 125th. But if we add the waters under our jurisdiction, we end up as no. 15 in terms of size.

We have a jurisdiction over waters which are 7 times as large as our territory.

That gives us responsibility.