



Thorbjørn Jagland
Secretary General of the Council of Europe

**Background information for
Constitutive meeting of the Executive Committee
of the North-South Centre
Strasbourg, 24 June 2011**

Dear members,

I am glad to be present here today at the constitutive meeting of the Executive Committee of the North-South Centre. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the member States and stakeholders for their contribution to the process which has led to the adoption of this new statute.

The adoption of this resolution was a crucial step which positively concluded a process launched in November 2009 by the Parliamentary Assembly, in connection with the 20th Anniversary of the Centre.

Through this decision, the member States – and indeed all the stakeholders of the North-South Centre – have confirmed its relevance and importance, at a time when the Arab countries - our neighbours - are facing historical changes.

Allow me to recall the main lines of the Centre's new statute, which entered into force on 1 June 2011:

- the Centre keeps its present legal nature, and continues to function as an enlarged partial agreement of the Council of Europe;
- an invitation is made to all member States of the Council of Europe as well as to the European Union to join the Centre as soon as possible;
- the Centre will mainly act as an interface between the Council of Europe and countries in neighbouring regions which are interested in cooperating with the Organisation, by offering them a platform for structured cooperation at different levels (governments, parliamentarians, local and regional authorities, civil society);
- the two former statutory organs of the Centre have been merged into a new "Executive Committee", which is the single decision making body of the North-South Centre: through this important structural change, the "quadrilogue" functioning of the Centre is preserved, while full participation of all member states in the decision making process is ensured;

- the relationship with the European Union will be reinforced, through the introduction of the EU Committee of Regions as a new stake-holder of the North-South Centre;
- the priority areas of the Centre are confirmed (education, youth, intercultural dialogue), with an increased focus on the promotion of Council of Europe principles and values beyond the European continent.

Today, the new Executive Committee should elect its Chair, as foreseen under item 2 of the agenda. I therefore invite the Executive Committee to adopt the draft agenda and we can then proceed to the election of the Chair.

On the closing date of the call for candidatures, only one had been received, that of Ms Deborah Bergamini of Italy, presented by Ambassador Sergio Busetto, Permanent Representative of Italy to the Council of Europe. Ms Bergamini's curriculum vitae has been made available to you in today's documents. As Ms Bergamini is the only candidate, I invite you to express your support for her candidature as Chair of your Executive Committee.

I would like to hand over to Ms Bergamini and wish you every success with your work today.