



norden

Nordic Council of Ministers
Nordic Council

Co-operation for Strength



Dynamic and modern

The Nordic Region is a land of long summer evenings, dark winters, unspoiled nature, thousands of lakes and dramatic seas. But it is also a dynamic region at the forefront of the information society, home to global brands like Nokia and Ericsson. The Nordic Region is where a strong spirit of co-operation between the countries of the far north of Europe has developed, deeply rooted in centuries of shared history, shared cultural traditions, shared geography, similar living conditions and similar societies.

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Together, the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers engage in the most comprehensive regional co-operation to be found in Europe. Their political collaboration is based on common values and the will to achieve results that contribute to the dynamism of the Region and make it more effective and competitive.

In the new enlarged European Union (EU), closer dialogue between the Nordic countries about international issues, particularly European ones, is an important challenge.

In an increasingly globalised economy, the Region is now developing even closer internal co-operation, and facilitating more freedom of movement for both people and companies, in an open and flexible Nordic market.



Working together

Nordic co-operation involves Finland, Iceland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden, as well as the autonomous territories of Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The five states and three autonomous territories all have different relationships with other European and global bodies such as the EU and NATO, but all are members of the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Formal co-operation emerged in the aftermath of World War II, when it was motivated by a desire to find joint solutions to the challenges faced in the Region at the time. The Nordic Council was established in 1952, and the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1971. The guidelines for the work of both the Council and the Council of Ministers were laid out in the Helsinki Treaty in 1962.

Members of Parliament from the Nordic countries and autonomous territories address issues of mutual interest through the Nordic Council. Representatives of the Nordic governments meet under the auspices of the Council of Ministers, which conducts political debates, makes decisions about Nordic conventions and so on, and takes care of any other business related to the co-operation.

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MPs and government representatives meet to discuss Nordic issues at the annual Session of the Nordic Council, a unique political forum. The Session also approves the Council of Ministers' budget, which earmarks funds for co-operation on priority issues.

Contributions to the Nordic budget are calculated according to a sliding scale based on national GDP. The cost corresponds to approximately DKK 33.00 (€4.43) per citizen, per annum.

Nordic synergy

Nordic co-operation is designed to offer participants more than individual countries can accomplish on their own. This is known as 'Nordic synergy'. The co-operation is designed to:

- make the prospect of living, working and doing business in the Northern part of Europe more attractive
- make small countries stronger
- strengthen the international impact of Nordic values
- preserve Nordic languages, history and traditions in an increasingly globalised world
- bring together the Nordic countries and like-minded states, and adopt joint positions on issues to be debated in international forums.





The European context

When the EU was enlarged in 2004, ten new member countries were added and the geopolitical map of Europe was redrawn. The EU is now the most important multilateral body in Europe, and Nordic co-operation is part of a much wider European context than before.

The sense of community shared by the Nordic countries can be used to strengthen the Region's position in the new international and European structures. One example of this is Nordic co-operation on research, an area in which common priorities have helped the Region to compete on an equal basis with the traditional centres of European research.

Another example is the ambition of promoting complete freedom of movement between the Nordic countries, which will make the Region more attractive as European and global competition intensifies.

Under the Helsinki Treaty, the Nordic countries are obliged to 'hold joint consultations on matters of common interest which are dealt with by European and other international organisations and conferences', a provision that forms the basis for extensive informal Nordic collaboration, especially within the EU.

The EU has a political and practical interest in there being efficient regional structures for co-operation,

which are capable of relieving pressure on the EU's institutions. The Nordic Region offers a role model in this context, particularly because its pragmatic structures also involve partnerships with other EU member states.

The Prime Ministers of those Nordic countries that are members of the EU hold informal discussions before EU summits, indicating just how important they consider Nordic co-operation to be. Non-members, Norway and Iceland, are kept informed of the deliberations at these meetings. Since they joined the EU in 2004, the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) have also attended the meetings.

When the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation and the various Ministerial Councils meet under the auspices of the Council of Ministers, EU issues are fixed items on the agenda. Several groups of Nordic ministers also meet prior to EU meetings, and European issues feature on the agendas of the Presidium and committees of the Nordic Council.

The Nordic Region has taken special responsibility for work on the EU's Northern Dimension; for example, the Council of Ministers helped draw up the second action plan in 2004 and is playing an active role in its implementation. The Council of Ministers co-operates with other inter-

national organisations in the north of Europe to make sure that responsibilities are shared in a sensible manner.

The Council of Ministers is also extensively involved in activities in north-west Russia, especially activities designed to promote democracy. The members of the Nordic Council have prioritised the forging of contacts with their counterparts in north-west Russia, in order to extend their network of contacts and facilitate co-operation within the Northern Dimension.

In many ways, the 'internal' work being done to maintain and reinforce the Nordic position as a competitive growth region in the north of Europe serves as a source of inspiration for similar work within the EU.

Co-ordinating the implementation of EU directives and regulations is an important task for Nordic case law. Nordic MPs also attempt to influence EU decisions.

In the West

The sea has always played an important role in the daily life of the Nordic people, both as a link connecting them to one another and as a source of income, especially in the West Nordic Region. The sea and its resources are the focal point of the Nordic Atlantic Co-operation (NORA), which consists of Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. One way of strengthening the impact

of NORA would be to invite neighbouring countries in the area to join it. The Nordic Council also enjoys observer status on the British-Irish Inter-parliamentary Body (BIIPB).

Nordic politicians discuss the condition of the North Atlantic and the sustainable use of its resources with neighbouring countries who also share the ocean. An example of this

is the EU's Northern Periphery Programme, one positive outcome of regional co-operation with Scotland.

The West Nordic Council, which is an inter-parliamentary body involving Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, is an important partner in the west of the Nordic Region. It pays particular attention to transport issues.



To the East

No less than 20% of the Nordic Council of Ministers' budget is earmarked for co-operation with neighbouring countries to the east. Initially, co-operation with the three Baltic countries took the form of development aid but the situation has since changed, and the Baltic and Nordic countries now work together as equal partners. Co-operation between the Council of Ministers and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is based on political guidelines adopted by the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation.

Co-operation with the Baltic States was established as early as the beginning of the 1990s, and this was later followed by co-operation with north-west Russia. Early contacts with the Nordic Region were important for the Baltic States, and have left an indelible mark on what has become a very close form of collaboration on many levels, in particular on labour market issues, the campaign against trafficking in women and children and the war on organised crime and corruption. The Baltic Assembly is based on the model of its sister organisation, the Nordic Council. The two organisations signed a co-operation agreement as long ago as 1992. This has subsequently been amended, most recently in 2005, and now prioritises partnerships around tangible political issues, which are addressed by the respective relevant committees.

The Nordic Council of Ministers runs offices in the three Baltic capitals and in north-west Russia. Those offices also run 'InfoPoints', which also help to forge contacts in the area.

The vision for the future of the Nordic-Baltic partnership is one of an even closer sense of political community which will help to create a competitive 'domestic market' in the north of Europe. It will also be possible to work together on EU issues of mutual interest.

The Baltic States are now members of the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB), the first of the previously exclusively Nordic institutions to have expanded its ownership. The Council of Ministers is in favour of more Nordic institutions being transformed into Nordic-Baltic institutions.

The focus is now on co-operation with north-west Russia. The Ministers for Nordic Co-operation have also laid down political guidelines for working with Russia. The Nordic Council attempts to influence political opinion in the Nordic countries and Russia by means of meetings and seminars. The members of the Nordic Council also strive to incorporate the issue of conditions faced by indigenous peoples into the Northern Dimension's action plan to support minorities in north-west Russia.



Exchange programmes are an important element of co-operation with north-west Russia, and a key aspect of the Russia Programme that informs the work of the Council of Ministers. Exchange programmes give Russian politicians, civil servants and researchers the opportunity to 'learn by doing'. Exchange programmes also help build networks between the Nordic Region and north-west Russia, including networks of MPs. Every year, MPs from north-west Russia visit two Nordic parliaments to take part in talks and exchange experiences.



Co-ordination

As well as the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, a number of other multilateral bodies operate in the north of Europe. The Baltic Sea States work together in the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), a body that collaborates closely with the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Nordic Council is also represented on the governing body of another important organisation, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC). The BSPC Secretariat is based at the Nordic Council in Copenhagen.

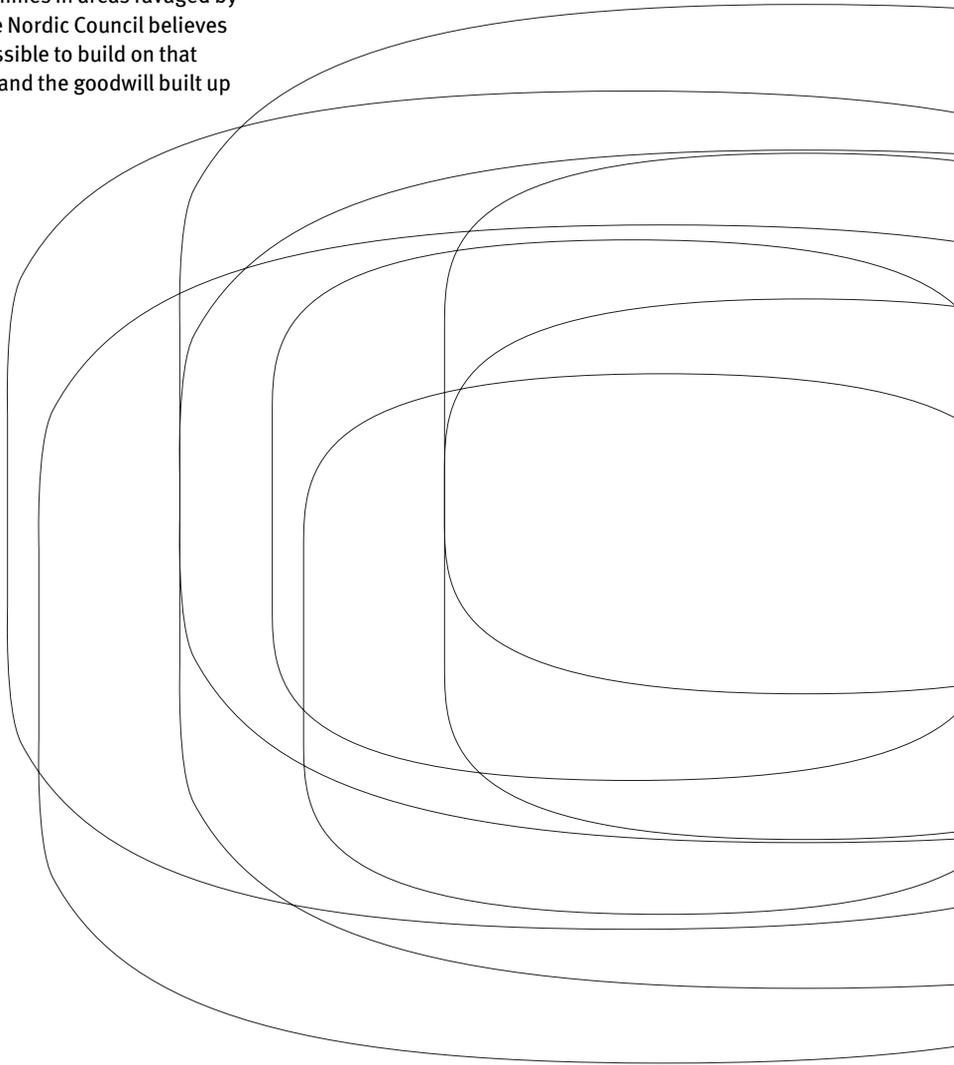
The Nordic Council enjoys observer status on the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region. The Nordic Council of Ministers has permanent observer status in the Arctic Council, members of which include the Nordic countries, Russia, the USA and Canada, as well as organisations representing the indigenous peoples of the Arctic.

Nordic politicians also maintain close contacts with the Barents Council and the relatively new Barents Parliamentary Conference.

The Nordic Region has extensive experience of, and expertise in, international conflict resolution and peacekeeping activities. One example of this is the military response unit, Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support (NORDCAPS). Another example is the fact that so many prominent Nordic

citizens and organisations have acted as mediators, usually under the auspices of the UN, and have assumed responsibility for reconstruction programmes in areas ravaged by conflict. The Nordic Council believes that it is possible to build on that experience and the goodwill built up

by the Nordic Region, in order to develop models and knowledge databases for conflict prevention, crisis management and civil security.





Agenda

The Nordic countries work together in a number of different spheres. Within the constraints of the annual budget, political priorities for the *Council of Ministers* are stipulated in the action programme for the year, which is drawn up by the country that holds the annual Presidency. Priorities include promoting freedom of movement, promoting research and innovation, and preserving the Nordic environment and culture.

The members of the *Nordic Council* debate priorities at the annual Session. The Council's priorities for the future are to 'carve out a clear profile and platform among the growing number of stakeholders and initiatives in the Region' and reinforce its role as 'a proactive body that takes initiatives on important issues'.

The Council aims to develop Nordic co-operation, promote freedom of

movement between the Nordic countries, strengthen the position of the Nordic Region in Europe, build bridges between the EU/EEA and Russia, and support sustainable development in the Arctic, Barents and West Nordic regions.





Hello Norden

The Hello Norden information service makes it easier to find answers to questions, large and small, about obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement. Hello Norden is an online service, but also operates a telephone helpline in each of the Nordic countries. Hello Norden also works closely with other regional information services, for example, in the Øresund Region. Problems identified by Hello Norden are passed on through the Nordic system so steps can be taken to resolve issues.

No borders

The Nordic countries combine to form a robust and dynamic region. In order to remain attractive and competitive on a global level, however, the Nordic Region will need to remove all obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement so that people, goods, services and companies are able to circulate freely in an inner Nordic market.

In the slightly longer term, the vision of a region without borders could

be extended to cover the Baltic Sea Region as well.

The members of the Nordic Council would also like to see a solution to the question of whether citizens of non-Nordic countries who have been granted residence and work permits in a Nordic country should enjoy the same rights to freedom of movement over Nordic borders as Nordic citizens. Other important issues that the

Council would like to see addressed include the differences between the countries in the rules for early retirement, disablement pension and taxation of pensions.

Recent improvements to freedom of movement

- **New Nordic agreement about civil registration numbers.** In November 2004, an agreement was signed to simplify and speed up the procedure for issuing Nordic citizens with new civil registration numbers when they settle in other Nordic countries.
- **New Nordic convention on social security and social benefits.** Under the new agreement on social security and social benefits, the Nordic countries have a duty to co-operate on the terms and conditions pertaining to people who move to other Nordic countries and need social security or assistance because of disability.
- **Øresund Agreement.** In 2003, the Danish and Swedish governments signed a new Øresund Agreement about the taxation of commuters. The agreement improves conditions for paying into pension funds, introduces deductions for bridge tolls and outlines the tax rules, for example, for commuters who do some of their work at home.
- **New tax portal.** A new online Nordic tax portal has been set up, which citizens can turn to for accurate, up-to-date information about taxation issues. The fact that people are able to pose questions online and receive answers from tax authorities in several different countries is unique. The tax portal can be reached through the Nordic information service, www.hallonorden.org or directly at www.nordiskeitax.net
- **Online job centre.** A digital job centre has been set up on the internet, where companies and job seekers can advertise or look for jobs in a whole region in the same place at the same time (in the first instance, the Øresund Region). The virtual job centre can be reached via the Nordic information service, www.hallonorden.org
- **Online business portal.** A portal has been set up to improve the flow of information about opportunities for Nordic businesses to operate throughout the Region. It contains all the relevant information and links and can be found at www.hallonorden.org

Sustainability

The Nordic Region is a global leader in environmental protection and sustainable development. The Nordic Environmental Protection Convention states that the Nordic countries must inform each other about decisions that might have an impact on the environment or cause contamination in other countries. This gives the opportunity to influence decisions being made in neighbouring countries.

Nordic environmental co-operation is based on the principle of the 'highest common denominator', where the country with the highest environmental ambitions serves as the yardstick. This principle is also designed to promote Nordic policies on nature and the environment in international forums, particularly in the EU.

The Council of Ministers has adopted a pan-Nordic strategy for sustainable development. Sustainable development cannot be achieved by a single region in isolation. The Nordic Region is dependent on developments in Europe and all over the world. The Nordic strategy serves as the basis for the impact the Region makes at international level, for example, the influence exerted by the Nordic Region on EU programmes, both within the EU and at global level.

The Nordic strategy for sustainable development started out as a more traditional environmental strategy but has been extended to encompass

social aspects, education and training, the climate, biodiversity, genetic resources, sea, chemicals and food.

There is an obligation to future generations to preserve genetic materials. The Nordic Gene Bank, which is a Council of Ministers' institution, collects and preserves samples from plants all over the Region. The material is freely accessible. It has been decided to collect genetic material from the fisheries and fish-farming sectors as well. The Nordic Gene Bank Farm Animals contains material from Nordic farm animals and livestock, and supports research designed to improve breeding.

Nordic fisheries co-operation promotes dialogue about the best way to manage fish stocks. In recent years an initiative has been established in the North Atlantic. The Nordic Council has been campaigning to have the Baltic Sea classified as a particularly sensitive sea area (PSSA). This work has been done in close conjunction with the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC).

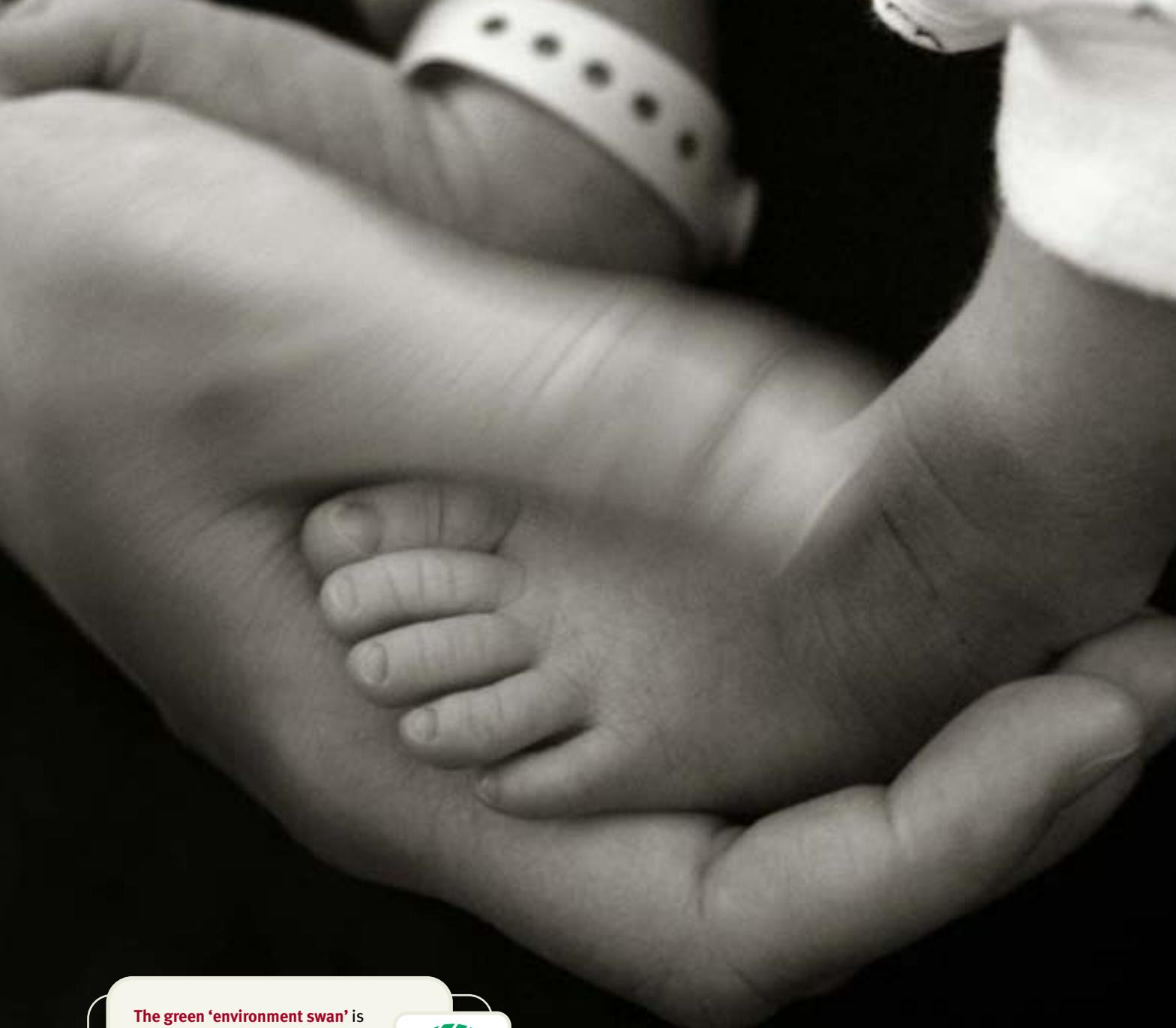
Safe food is an important issue. The Nordic ministers with responsibility for food issues have adopted a declaration about 'the ethical labelling of food'. The national food safety bodies meet yearly to exchange opinions and talk about their experiences promoting healthy food. The Nordic

countries have been issuing special recommendations about diet since the early 1990s. The advice is scientifically based, and adapted to suit the different Nordic countries.

The Nordic Region aims to maintain its strong influence on the development of EU environmental legislation. The EU's 'Neighbourhood Policy' opens up new dimensions for environmental co-operation with adjacent areas, as well as for multilateral activities and methods of funding them. The Nordic funding body, the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO), and the joint Nordic-Baltic Investment Bank (NIB) are both important players in this field.

Sustainable energy is also very much on the Nordic agenda. The Nordic Council has collaborated with the Baltic Assembly and the Benelux Parliamentary Assembly on the issue. Members of these three organisations discuss the political and economic tools needed to develop sustainable and safe energy, increase fuel efficiency and reduce dependence on energy. The Nordic Council has also worked with the British Irish Inter-parliamentary Body (BIIPB) on safety issues and emissions from the Sellafield nuclear waste plant.

The Nordic Council awards an annual Nature and Environment Prize to increase awareness on nature and the environment in the Region.



The green 'environment swan' is the official Nordic environmental label. It now appears on more than 1,000 products, guaranteeing the consumer an environmentally friendly product.





Equality

A just and equal society requires an overarching policy that encompasses both women and men. The Nordic countries work closely and constructively together on gender equality, and are pioneers in this field. The Nordic Council has decided to place added emphasis on achieving gender equality in all of its activities.

A gender and equality perspective has been incorporated into all-important Nordic decisions about co-operation, as well as into the activities of the separate countries, such as the Council of Ministers' budget and the national budgets. Scholarship programmes, co-operation programmes and projects are all analysed from the perspective of equality. The same perspective is also expected to permeate the work and composition of the Nordic Secretariat, as well as other Nordic political bodies.

Active participation by men is an important prerequisite for equality. Funding for research into men, equality and the male role, therefore, has an important place in co-operation. Members of the Nordic Council and the Council of Europe have worked together on this issue.

Campaigns against trafficking in women for purposes of sexual exploitation are important elements of the Nordic-Baltic co-operation on equality. A network at government level is one of the outcomes, and

the possibility of temporary residence permits for the victims of trafficking is one issue that the Nordic and Baltic ministers with responsibility for gender equality have agreed to study. They are also looking into funding for voluntary organisations that work with the victims of trafficking and look at ways to help the women return home safely. Crisis centres in the Baltic States are other tangible results of Nordic-Baltic co-operation. One example of a Nordic initiative to promote equality activity in the Barents Region is a project to

offer alternative jobs to women and young girls, and a related campaign to counteract demand for sexual services.

Approximately one quarter of immigrant and refugee women are of non-European origin. The Nordic project 'Co-operate Equally' is designed to forge closer contacts with, and understanding of, women from different countries and cultures.

Knowledge society

Research and innovation are prerequisites for Nordic competitiveness. Part of the Nordic Research Board's remit is to promote the Nordic countries as a single integrated research region, and a world leader in the field. The national research councils, universities and other bodies that fund research are the main stakeholders on the Nordic Research Board. Nordic synergy increases the impact of the individual countries.

Nordic research co-operation has led to the establishment of Nordic Centres of Excellence in fields in which the Region enjoys the benefit of special expertise, which include the environment, the climate and molecular medicine, where attempts are being made to solve the mysteries of Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, migraine, epilepsy, cancer, etc.

The members of the Nordic Council would particularly like to see the Region exploit its potential to the full and with its highly trained and educated workforce, excellent infrastructure and harmonious labour markets entice investors (insourcing). They would also like to see political decisions being taken that would make the relocation of existing jobs (outsourcing) an unattractive proposition. The role of the Nordic Innovation Centre (NICE) is to devise and promote Nordic innovation policy.

Competition between different systems is a prerequisite if the IT market is to function properly. Members of the Nordic Council would like to see new skills centres and networks set up, where information and experiences can be discussed and advice about open source software passed on. They would also like to see official Nordic bodies and the Nordic governments make greater use of open source applications when appropriate.

To transform the whole of the Baltic Region into a competitive international alternative, co-operation is also being developed with other countries in research, innovation, education and training.

The Nordic Region pioneers adult further education. In Denmark, more than half of all people over 25 have been involved in further education in the last year. In the EU, the corresponding figure is one in three. A special Nordic Network for Adult Learning oversees this area.

Young people often dream of studying abroad. Such dreams can easily come true for Nordic citizens, thanks to the principle of equal access to higher education programmes throughout the Region. The Nordic countries also recognise ECTS credits and exam certificates from each other. Pupils at upper secondary schools are also eligible to take part in Nordic

exchange-year programmes, while the Nordplus programmes provide an opportunity for young people to apply for grants to study in neighbouring countries.

The five members of the Nordplus family of exchange and networking programmes are Nordplus, Nordplus Junior, Nordplus Sprog (Language), Nordplus Voksen (Adult) and Nordplus Nabo (Neighbour). As the names suggest, each programme has a different target group and, for example, Nordplus Nabo (Neighbour) is designed to encourage networking between the Nordic Region and Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and north-west Russia.

The sense of affinity in the Baltic Sea Region has been strengthened by co-operation between the Nordic and Baltic Ministers of Education. Issues discussed include the extension of the Nordplus programmes for exchange, network building and research. The members of the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly also consider investment in research to be a top priority.



Welfare

The Nordic welfare model faces a number of challenges. An ageing population will increase the cost of care and pensions, while at the same time the proportion of the population in work is shrinking, making it more difficult to cope with the costs of welfare. In addition, globalisation will also exert an increasing amount of external pressure on the Nordic welfare model.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has invested in a major, long-term research project into the challenges facing the Nordic welfare states. It includes studies of equality, immigration, care of the elderly and disabled. It is designed to provide a comprehensive picture of current knowledge and information, and to identify where further research is needed.

Alcohol policy is one of the most burning issues on the Nordic welfare agenda. The Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers have agreed to bolster co-operation between the countries on this topic. Differences will always exist be-

tween national policies on alcohol, but a joint strategy helps put a Nordic imprint on the alcohol policy agenda in, for example, the EU and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

One area with huge potential for development in such a vast Region with a large number of sparsely populated areas, is that of tele-medicine. The Nordic Council and Council of Ministers are committed to find practical and legal solutions, and to promote the widespread use of tele-medicine.

Psychiatric care finds itself at an interesting stage in the Nordic countries. Successful forms of treatment devised in one country can now be applied in others, and the Nordic Council actively encourages more widespread exchanges of information and experiences in this care sector.

The Nordic Region would like to be even more attractive to the global biotechnology industry. To this end, Nordic biotechnology legislation will have to be co-ordinated.

The members of the Nordic Council want to encourage greater interest in, and debate about, biotechnology issues as a means of assuming responsibility for the future, and for this important field of research. Seminars and political discussions throughout the Region are debating the controversial new ethical dilemmas surfacing as a result of more advanced biotechnology.

The EU Northern Dimension includes a specific partnership programme about health and well-being, directed at Russia in particular. The Council of Ministers is one of eight international organisations and 15 countries to adopt the October 2003 Oslo Declaration, the founding document for the partnership.





Culture

Cultural co-operation has always played an important role in the Nordic Region, since long before the structures for political co-operation fell into place. Culture acts as a bridge-builder and increases understanding of neighbouring peoples. Cultural exchanges provide new impulses and new ways of looking at life.

Cultural co-operation has made it easier to see the whole Region as a single unity, and to recognise mutual interests. Culture co-operation has often paved the way for co-operation in other sectors, on everything from the Nordic Passport Union to combating drug abuse and environmental pollution.

Nordic cultural co-operation has taken many different forms in the last half century. These have included

funding literary translations, guest performances by drama troupes, dance groups and opera companies in neighbouring countries, and tours by orchestras and music ensembles. Most important of all, Nordic co-operation has acted as a meeting place and discussion forum for artists of all types. Nordic networks have provided them with the opportunity to exchange information, discuss experiences, debate issues, encounter new ideas and meet new partners.

European integration and the rapid pace of IT progress mean that not only Europe but the whole world is getting “smaller”. Nordic cultural co-operation has sought to present the Nordic countries to the rest of the world as a coherent unit whose components are working together and building new networks. In recent years, Nordic cultural projects have forged new contacts in, for example, South Africa, the British Isles and the former Yugoslavia.

Today, official Nordic cultural co-operation consists of a large number of institutions, working parties, expert groups and ongoing projects. As a result, there is a distinct Nordic presence in all the Nordic countries and autonomous territories. Some of the major institutions and funds have been located in different parts of the Nordic Region at different times. ‘Nordic Houses’ are located in Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe

Islands, and there are Nordic Institutes in Åland and Finland. The Nordic Houses have a dual mandate to present culture from the rest of the Nordic Region and to showcase local culture and artists.

IT has reduced distances in time and space and made cultural products more easily accessible. At the same time, English has become more and more prevalent, and much of the youngest generation’s media use is now in English. A new Nordic media programme aims to improve the opportunities for developing Nordic computer games and interactive media for young children. The media programme stems from the positive experiences of the Nordic Film and TV Fund, which has financed the production and distribution of films and TV programmes since 1989.

The Nordic Council Literature Prize was inaugurated in 1961. The Nordic Council Music Prize was added in 1964, and the Nordic Council Film Prize in 2005. Film production has increased in the Nordic Region in the last decade, and Nordic films now reach an increasingly large audience, not only in the country where they are produced but also in neighbouring countries. The highly prestigious prizes are each worth DKK 350,000.



The Nordic Council

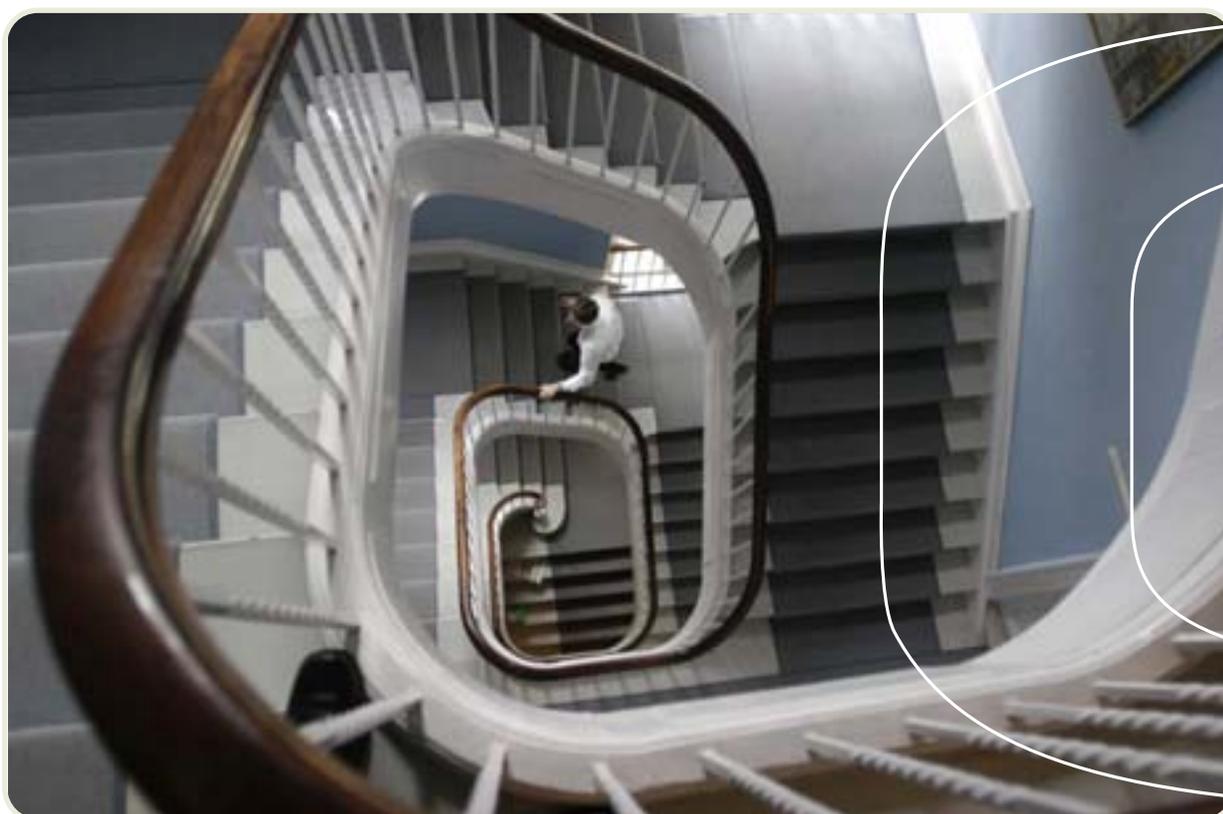
The members of the Nordic Council take political initiatives, discuss topical political issues and make recommendations – tangible proposals for action put to the Nordic governments – at the annual Session. The Council also follows up, to make sure that the governments are implementing decisions about Nordic co-operation. The proposals are drawn up in the first instance by the four Nordic party

groups or by the national delegations on the Nordic Council. For recommendations to become reality, they have to be taken up by the Council of Ministers, national parliaments or governments.

The Council has five committees, which meet five times a year. An annual programme is drawn up for the work of the Council. The annual

budget is approximately DKK 30 million.

In the composition of the party groups on the Nordic Council, strenuous efforts are made to reflect the relative strengths of the political parties in the national parliaments. This means that the groups are changed from time to time, in the wake of general election results. The 87 members of



the Council are elected by the respective parliaments.

Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland have 20 members each. The Danish delegation includes two members each from the Faroe Islands and Greenland, while Åland's two members are part of the Finnish delegation. Iceland has seven members.

Nordic Council committees

- *The Presidium* – which is responsible for the work of the Nordic Council, consists of a President, a Vice-President and 11 ordinary members, elected for a year at a time. They are elected along at the Session, along with the committee chairpersons and the Control Committee. The Presidency alternates between the countries. The countries take turns at hosting the annual Session, and the President of the Council always comes from the country hosting the Session.
- *The Culture and Education and Training Committee* – General culture and art in the Nordic Region and beyond, the multicultural and multiethnic Nordic Region, film and media, languages, sport, the Nordic Associations and the voluntary sector, children's and youth culture, primary and secondary schools, the Nordic education and training market, general and adult education, lifelong learning, research, researcher training and research exchange programmes.
- *The Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee* – Democracy, human rights, civil rights, equality, consumer affairs, food safety, crime fighting including the war on international crime and terrorism, justice policy, immigration and refugees, co-operation against racism.
- *The Environment and Natural Resources Committee* – Sustainable development, energy, nuclear power, the environment and nature, fisheries, agriculture and forestry, the seas, sea mammals and large beasts of prey.
- *The Business and Industry Committee* – Business/industry, the inner market, freedom of movement, removal of obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement, trade, regions and structural aid, employment and the labour market, the working environment, infrastructure/transport, communication and IT.
- *The Welfare Committee* – Welfare and social security, social and health care, disability, building, construction and housing, the family, children and young people, drugs, alcohol and other forms of substance abuse.

The Nordic Council of Ministers

The Nordic Council of Ministers is a multilateral body made up of representatives of the Nordic governments. The Nordic Prime Ministers have the ultimate responsibility for inter-governmental co-operation. In practice, responsibility is delegated to the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation and the Nordic Committee for Co-operation, which consists of members of staff who work for the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation. These ministers are effectively in charge of co-operation between the Nordic governments, and make policy decisions.

The Nordic Council of Ministers consists of one Council for the Ministers of Nordic Co-operation and 10 separate Ministerial Councils covering different areas of co-operation:

- labour market and working environment
- business and industry, energy and regional policy
- fisheries, agriculture, forestry and food
- culture
- equality
- legislative issues
- the environment
- social and health affairs
- education, training and research
- economic and fiscal policy.

The Presidency of the Council of Ministers alternates between the Nordic countries on an annual basis. Most of

the Councils of Ministers meet several times a year. The Ministers are assisted in their work by Committees of Senior Officials, which help the Secretariat to prepare meetings and lay the groundwork for decisions.

Some of the initiatives undertaken by the Council of Ministers take the form of proposals to the Nordic Council.

The Council of Ministers is responsible for activities that range from Nordic research projects, Nordic institutions, Nordic offices in the Baltic countries and north-west Russia, and negotiations about agreements and conventions.

Decisions made by the Council of Ministers have to be unanimous because the co-operation is international in nature, not supranational. In certain cases, decisions also have to be approved by the respective national parliaments.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' annual budget is approximately DKK 800 million.



The Secretariat

The Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat consists of four sectoral departments as well as service, administration and human resources departments. The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General. The departments' main responsibilities are: culture; education, training and research; the environment and resources; and the competitiveness of the Nordic Region.

The job of the Secretariat is to assist the work of the various Councils of Ministers. The Council of Ministers' Secretariat also undertakes initiatives designed to promote Nordic co-operation. One of the Secretariat's most important tasks is to administer

the projects and other initiatives funded by the Council of Ministers' budget.

The Nordic Council Secretariat works for the Council committees and working parties, as well as the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC). The Secretariat lays the groundwork for the issues taken up by the members of the Council, and prepares, organises and keeps the minutes of the annual Sessions. The Council Director is in charge of the work of the Secretariat and the Presidium.

The Secretariat has a joint website at www.norden.org where further information about the Nordic co-opera-

tion is available. Both Secretariats are based in central Copenhagen.

Delegation Secretariats are linked to the national and devolved parliaments, and co-operation offices are attached to the Government Offices.

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Previous achievements

- Right of Nordic citizens to travel between Nordic countries without a passport and to reside in another Nordic country without a residence permit, 1954
- Convention on social security, 1955
- Right to work in another Nordic country without special permission, 1982
- Right to use own language in another Nordic country, 1987
- Right to study at upper secondary school, 1992, and at universities/colleges, 1996
- Exams valid in all Nordic countries
- The environment swan – joint Nordic environmental label



Institutions

The Nordic institutions are important tools for achieving the political goals set by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Their work is a central element in Nordic co-operation and reflects the political priorities adopted by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Each institution has its own board of directors with members from each of the five countries. Representatives from the autonomous territories may

also participate in the work of the boards. The Secretariat has observers on the boards.

The institutions are very different from each other but each is an integral part of the overall structure for co-operation.

Examples of institutions include:

- The Nordic Gene Bank
- The Nordic Research Board

- Nordic Centre for Spatial Development
- The Nordic Innovation Centre
- The Nordic Institute for Asian Studies
- The Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research
- The Nordic Project Fund
- The Nordic Environment Finance Corporation.



Useful websites

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The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers	www.norden.org
The Nordic Cultural Fund	www.nordiskkulturfond.dk
Hello Norden	www.hallonorden.org
The Nordic Tax Portal	www.nordisketax.net
The NORDPLUS family	www.norden.org/nordplus
The Nordic Investment Bank	www.nib.int
The Nordic Gene Bank	www.ngb.se
The Nordic Research Board	www.nordforsk.org
The Nordic Centre for Spatial Development	www.nordregio.se
The Nordic Innovation Centre	www.nordicinnovation.net
The Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research	www.nikk.uio.no
The Nordic Project Fund	www.nopef.com
The Nordic Environment Finance Corporation	www.nefco.fi
The Council of Ministers Office in Tallinn	www.norden.ee
The Council of Ministers Office in Riga	www.nmr.lv
The Council of Ministers Office in Vilnius	www.norden.lt
The Council of Ministers Office in St Petersburg	www.norden.ru
The Nordic House in Reykjavík	www.nordice.is
The Nordic House in the Faroe Islands	www.nlh.fo
The Nordic Institute in Finland	www.nifin.helsinki.fi
The Nordic Institute in Greenland	www.napa.gl
The Nordic Institute in Åland	www.nordinst.aland.fi

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The Nordic swan

The official mark of Nordic co-operation consists of two elements: the swan symbol, which was introduced in 1985, and the 'Norden' logo, which was introduced in 2004. Nordic co-operation involves Finland, Iceland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden as well as the autonomous territories of Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland, and 'Norden' is the international name for Nordic co-operation in all of the Scandinavian languages.



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