



The Nordic Region: A region of opportunity close to you

Programme for The Finnish Presidency of the Nordic
Council of Ministers 2007

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Nordic cooperation

Nordic cooperation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and three autonomous areas: the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic cooperation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic cooperation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Common Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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Foreword

The Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2007 (the Presidency) is designed to improve the capacity of the Nordic Region to meet global challenges and to build confidence in the Nordic model and in the capacity of civic society to function properly.

The Council of Ministers plans to improve the competitiveness of the Region in 2007 and stresses the importance of refining the welfare concept. Particular attention will be paid to co-operation on research and innovation that will benefit business in the Region.

Finland will prioritise key welfare factors such as education, culture and health and social services, supporting and refining them within the framework of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Nordic goal of gender equality will be promoted in the Region and beyond. Finland supports the idea of making the Region more visible in a global context by developing the positive characteristics of Nordic society into an actual brand.

As far as the EU's Northern Dimension and its new framework document are concerned, attention will focus on the challenges faced in the environmental sector and in health and social services. The Presidency will pay particular attention to the condition of the Baltic, intensify research co-operation around its shores and promote projects designed to improve marine safety.

Finland intends to encourage closer and more in-depth co-operation on energy in the Region, in the context of both the rapid changes affecting international energy policies and the objectives laid down by the European Union. The Presidency will also advocate the Nordic perspective in the international debate on climate change, with due regard to established practice in energy co-operation, the limitations imposed upon the energy sector by climate-change policy and the challenges posed by the legislative framework.

Finland will also commence talks on the future of co-operation between the Baltic States, the Council of Ministers and its institutions.

A central theme of the Presidency will be freedom of movement for Nordic citizens, in particular young people and students. A children's and young people's perspective will be integrated into all work across all of the Council of Ministers' sectors, in accordance with the new strategy for children and young people. Plans are also being drawn up to further develop Nordic youth information services.

Finland aims to work more closely with its Nordic partners, enhance the visibility of Nordic co-operation at both national and Nordic level, and afford its citizens and residents more opportunities to exert their in-

fluence. The Presidency will also seek to increase public interest in the Nordic Council of Ministers and Nordic co-operation.

I Premises and objectives of the Finnish Presidency 2007

The Nordic Region regularly comes out top in international studies of competitiveness, sustainable development, education, welfare, living standards and equality. The Nordic countries share a common value system, have similar social structures and are close neighbours with stable, open and democratic societies. Other countries are interested in learning more about the Nordic social model.

The main pillars of the model are a tradition of dynamic constitutional principles, active popular movements and civic organisations, freedom of expression, equality, solidarity and affinity with nature. Combined with hard work and enterprise, these elements form the basis of a society that promotes productivity, a sense of security and a balanced relationship between the individual and the community.

Acting within its traditions and social structures, the Nordic Region is, to the best of its abilities, responding to the challenges presented by globalisation. The more effectively the Nordic countries tackle these challenges, the more attractive and competitive the Region as a whole becomes.

The Nordic trump cards in global competition are adaptability, welfare, co-operation, stability and security. Co-operation is growing closer, and not only in spheres that directly affect the Region. The Region is responding positively to globalisation, and the Nordic countries are playing an active role in the changes brought about by the phenomenon, both in the Region and elsewhere.

The Nordic Region has contributed much to Europe and the European Union. For EU members Finland, Sweden and Denmark, and for EEA members Iceland and Norway, membership means those issues affecting a particular country or those that have wider Nordic significance are increasingly dealt with in a European context. The Nordic countries also add value to the work of the Council of Europe. The Region is becoming European, but at the same time Nordic features are being incorporated into Europe.

Life at such northerly latitudes is directly reflected in the very concept of the 'Nordic'. Indeed, the geographic location of the Region, including the fact that it borders on the Atlantic in the West and Russia in the East, influence concepts of 'Nordic' and the 'Far North' throughout the world. In turn, the Northern Dimension is a tangible expression of all that is important and essential in the whole of the North, from East to West, for the whole of Europe.

At the same time as the Northern Dimension is making great strides forward, the various regional bodies in northern Europe are also working ever more closely together and dividing up responsibilities between them in an ever more sensible manner. The Nordic countries participate in the work of creating stability and improving security in the Adjacent Areas through the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the Arctic Council (AC) and other bodies.

Integration and diversity in the Nordic Region

Nordic integration benefits the whole of Europe. Co-operation and integration between the Nordic countries was already making headway (e.g. with a common labour market, reciprocal social-security provisions and the passport union) long before European integration really got under way.

The Nordic Region acts as a model for the ideal European domestic market. The process of Nordic integration in business, in areas such as financial services, including banking, investment and insurance, in telecommunications, construction, media, retailing, forestry and many others, provides evidence of the Region's adaptability.

Greater co-operation in research and innovation is helping to make the Nordic Region more attractive. In addition, fewer obstacles to freedom of movement allow for the expansion of the Nordic domestic market, which in turn confers benefits on all of Europe. The Nordic Region also aims to improve European competitiveness and productivity.

To cope with global challenges, the Nordic Region needs to ensure that the right conditions for its business sectors and labour markets exist and continue to be developed. It must also protect vital public services, such as education, health and social services. Properly functioning social structures enable a society to cope with a variety of threats and maintain stability even in times of crisis.

The welfare and security of all who live in the Nordic Region are further strengthened by tolerant appreciation of the diverse cultural and religious groups that make up its population. Tolerance and the acceptance of different cultures form part of the Nordic tradition, underpinning democracy, freedom of expression, equality and solidarity. Maintaining an open, prosperous society will continue to be a priority for the Nordic Region in the future.

The Nordic peoples have lived in harmony with nature for centuries, benefiting from its riches and its diversity. Climate change is becoming a major cause for concern across the globe, but for people in the Nordic Region it is already very much a motivating factor. As consumers they are ready to accept their responsibility for mitigating environmental problems in the Nordic Region, in the Adjacent Areas and around the world.

The Nordic countries are often regarded by the world – and indeed by Europe – as a homogenous region with a public sector that guarantees a comprehensive, efficient welfare system, coupled with taxation which is relatively high by international standards. People in the Region see the similarities between the Nordic countries, but they are also aware of the constitutional, cultural, linguistic and scientific differences, and accept this diversity as a vital aspect of co-operation. Nordic co-operation is based on respecting the differences between the people who live in the Region, but it also aims to promote a sense of affinity.

Public participation

One of the defining characteristics of the Nordic Region is that, by international standards, the distance between the citizens and their rulers is a short one. But that distance can be made shorter still, and government can always be more transparent. The Nordic Council of Ministers, which is responsible for Nordic inter-governmental co-operation, will play an important role in this process.

The Finnish Presidency intends to increase opportunities for its citizens to have an influence upon its affairs. The aims of the Presidency will not be restricted to traditional organisational activities. The objective is to supply clear information via new communication channels, in order to provide the Region with an effective platform on which to present itself and its values. As the citizens gain greater knowledge and understanding of the Council of Ministers' activities, their opportunities for influencing those affairs will also improve.

The new structure of the Nordic Council of Ministers, combined with the Nordic tendency to constantly seek improvement, allows it to streamline its activities, thereby increasing efficiency and generating regional synergies. Nordic co-operation must achieve more than the member countries are capable of when acting in isolation. The added value that comes about through co-operation requires political will and popular support in all the participating countries, as well as closer collaboration between the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic institutions and the Nordic Council.

Presidential objectives

As a result of Finland holding the Presidency of the EU during the second half of 2006, its Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers was postponed until 2007. The Presidency Programme takes account of both its simultaneous presidency of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the co-operation that will take place during the International Polar Year 2007–

2008. Allowances have also been made for the work and objectives of northern Europe's other regional bodies, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

Finland recognises the importance of continuity in Nordic co-operation and has in part based its programme on the work done under former presidencies. Some of the programme's themes transcend sectors – such as sustainable development, research, innovation, co-operation in the Adjacent Areas, equality and equal opportunities, children and young people and Nordic-language issues – but it is mainly organised by sector. The programme also takes account of the Nordic Council of Ministers' established priorities and strategic guidelines.

Research, innovation and welfare

The programme reflects the challenges of globalisation such as increased international competition of many different kinds, and the need to meet these challenges in ways that respect the principles underlying the Nordic welfare-state model. In order to enhance competitiveness, the programme stresses the importance of investing in innovation, research and expertise, and their role in adding value to business, arts and culture, and other sectors.

Finland emphasises the importance of Nordic research and innovation by supporting the Nordic research bodies NordForsk and NICE. Support is also provided for innovative regional initiatives through exchanges of information and by comparing courses of action and experiences of best practice from the different Nordic countries.

Finland stresses the importance of stepping up co-operation in higher education, and intends to focus special attention on projects that promote greater mobility. These include the Nordic youth information services, the Nordplus mobility programme and the recently launched joint Nordic Masters programme.

Nordic co-operation in research and innovation has led, among other things, to improved marine safety – particularly on the Baltic Sea, highlighting its importance in international trade and benefiting the whole Baltic Sea Region. A concrete example of co-operation is BONUS-19, the Baltic States' joint research programme, which is being developed with the aid of the EU's seventh framework programme for research.

Finland intends to promote Nordic art and design and will seek to expand co-operation in areas such as research, industry and business, within and beyond the Nordic Region.

Increased competitiveness will be high on the agenda, in line with the principles of sustainable development. Finland will also initiate discussions on a review of the Nordic strategy for sustainable development, with the aim of refining the strategy so that it is seen as accessible and

transparent by Nordic citizens, and clearly stresses the importance of synergies.

The focus on Nordic competitiveness and economic growth will provide a stable basis for employment while making the welfare state even stronger. The fundamental point of the Nordic welfare state is to take care of all population groups, particularly those groups that would otherwise run the risk of damaging and irreversible marginalisation.

Finland will focus attention on measures designed to improve the health, wellbeing and social participation of the elderly in the Region. The aim is to establish a prosperous, dynamic and adaptable Nordic Region that is able to respond to demographic changes among its populace.

The EU and the Northern Dimension

Nordic co-operation and international affairs increasingly operate within the framework of European co-operation. The Nordic countries do not seek to form a permanent bloc in the EU, nor do they act as a bloc within the EU's co-operation structures. On the contrary, the Nordic Region often acts as a guide, supporting European initiatives by providing a good example, as in the Lisbon Process, of sustainable development, equality and equal opportunities, and research co-operation.

Finland intends to steer Nordic co-operation within the Council of Ministers even more closely towards EU policy guidelines. Finland considers it natural that the same items should appear on the agendas of both the Nordic Council of Ministers and the EU, and aims to initiate conscious, pre-emptive Nordic co-operation on EU and EEA issues, covering both decision-making and practical application.

The development of Northern Dimension policies will be directed towards a cohesive common policy on behalf of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland. Finland will stimulate co-operation between citizens and authorities in the Adjacent Areas through collaboration with the Nordic offices and diplomatic missions in Russia and in the Baltic States. All work undertaken in this area will be within the framework of the Nordic Council of Ministers' programme for Russia and the Baltic States.

Over the course of the Presidency particular attention will be paid to environmental issues, challenges in the health and social services sector and energy issues relating to the Nordic Dimension. Finland will also seek to achieve pan-Nordic support for the objectives of the Northern Dimension on traffic and logistics issues.

Finland aims to find common ground between its Presidency of the EU and its Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, with the aim of launching a long-term policy for the Northern Dimension based on its new framework document.

There will be a focus on the environment and nuclear safety, considered within the framework of the partnership on environmental issues. In addition to major initiatives, small and medium-sized local-authority environmental and energy-efficiency projects will be promoted.

Another priority in the Adjacent Areas will be the prevention of infectious and lifestyle-related diseases and the mitigation of social problems, in accordance with the framework of the partnership on health and social welfare.

During the year a number of events relating to the Northern Dimension will be organised. In addition to major projects and guidelines, efforts will be made to initiate small and medium-sized projects that will spread the benefits of Nordic synergy across northern Europe and the Baltic Sea Region.

During its Presidency Finland will seek to intensify co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and Nordic financial institutions, such as the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB), the Nordic Project Fund (NOPEF) and Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO), on Northern Dimension projects.

Proximity and mobility

During 2007, the Finnish Presidency will introduce the Council of Ministers' new arrangements for cultural co-operation. These will be more flexible and transparent, and based on thematic projects and programmes that support the overall aims.

Cultural co-operation is a key aspect of Nordic co-operation and is based on common experience throughout the member countries. Finland will seek to support cultural co-operation by encouraging public interest in playing an active role. Efforts will also be made to enhance cultural relations throughout the Nordic Region.

The foundation of equality policy is the Nordic Equality Programme for 2006–2010, which emphasises themes such as gender and power, and gender and youth.

The Presidency Programme stresses the importance of removing barriers to mobility in work and education, in the health and social-services sector, and in business. The Finnish Presidency will focus on access to services in all the Nordic languages and efforts will be made to simplify complicated tax and social-security procedures.

With regard to the ongoing development of public services, Finland places great importance on the sharing of knowledge between civil servants in the Nordic countries, particularly in light of the fact that the older generation of civil servants is approaching retirement, and thus valuable experience of co-operation is in danger of being lost. The younger gen-

eration must learn from its predecessors and begin to assert itself in the Nordic arena.

Therefore, attention will be focused on the implementation of Nordic civil servant exchange schemes. Co-operation between twinned towns and border communities is a demonstrable and effective form of co-operation that operates close to the people in the regions. Finland wants to safeguard the conditions for such co-operation and build upon the role it plays in promoting freedom of movement.

Finland intends to support the planned Social Portal and provide an outline for the Nordic youth information service – and further develop it where necessary.

Branding and streamlining Nordic co-operation

During its Presidency, Finland will emphasise Nordic values in a range of contexts and seek to create a brand that expresses positive Nordic characteristics.

Growing interest in the Nordic Region from the rest of the world is increasing its appeal in a number of ways, and it is becoming apparent that the Nordic model can be applied in a variety of situations. One example is the West Balkans, with co-operation programmes intended to increase productivity and improve welfare across the whole region. Inter-regional co-operation also promotes understanding between different cultures and religions, helping to establish a multicultural and egalitarian Nordic Region.

The defining characteristics of the Nordic brand would be our relatively narrow income spread, a comprehensive social safety net, equal educational opportunities, a childcare system which permits parents of small children to work, and childcare allowances that enable a balance between work and family life and allow children to be cared for at home. The maintenance and development of these attributes, despite the pressures of globalisation, present a crucial challenge for Nordic co-operation, and will demand constant research and attention.

One of Finland's primary concerns is public health, particularly research and innovation in relation to food safety and the effect of food-stuffs on health. A healthy Nordic diet is to be promoted, particularly in the Adjacent Areas, and work on public health will incorporate measures to combat obesity. Finland also aims to raise awareness of sustainable approaches to the exploitation of limited natural resources, and of the impact of the environment on public health.

The work of the Council of Ministers will make use of the Nordforsk's Nordic Centre of Excellence Programme on Food, Nutrition and Health.

During its Presidency Finland intends to introduce new structures and methods in several areas of Nordic co-operation. Various Committees of Senior Officials will collaborate with the Council of Ministers Secretariat to create the conditions for more proactive co-operation and even more efficient decision-making and practical action.

The Nordic languages are both mediums of Nordic co-operation and a special element of our cultures and heritage. For Finland, the Swedish language is an important key to Nordic co-operation. The Nordic Language Convention will be 20 years old on 1 March 2007, and the anniversary will provide an opportunity to evaluate the status and future of the Nordic languages and promote inter-Nordic language comprehension. Finland highlights the importance of better utilisation of information technology in order to enable efficient communication, while respecting the fundamental concept of the Nordic Language Convention, which stresses equality between the languages.

Proper language usage should be observed during meetings and when drawing up documents, and in this regard special attention must be paid to Hello Norden and to websites such as www.norden.org.

II Objectives and sector programmes

1 Culture, youth and sport

The Nordic concept provides particularly rich benefits in the area of culture, one of the Region's strongest exports, and Finnish culture is a distinctive facet of Nordic culture.

Finland will promote co-operation based on a broad concept of culture, which aims to provide greater opportunities for participation and improve conditions for those involved in cultural activities, thereby enabling them to work at Nordic level. Finland's primary objective is to guarantee good working conditions for Nordic cultural co-operation, despite operating in a changeable environment.

The long-awaited restructuring of the Nordic culture sector will be completed in 2007. The new structures should be transparent and facilitate mobility and personal interaction, so that everyone in the Nordic Region can enjoy art and the fruits of cultural co-operation.

The most important change in cultural co-operation is the transition from small Nordic sectoral institutions to a general system of programme budgeting. It is an important aim of the Presidency to ensure that the new structure benefits those actively engaged in cultural activities. In pursuing this Nordic cultural reform, the Finnish Presidency will develop a range of funding models.

The Nordic Cultural Forum will be further developed as a means of communicating with those active in culture, and other priorities will include user-friendliness and the customer perspective. An action programme for culture will be drawn up in collaboration with the Secretariat. The aim is that the new co-operation structure should inspire a fresh approach to cultural co-operation. The Presidency will also facilitate improved communication and establish new networks involving national cultural institutions and bodies involved in Nordic cultural co-operation.

Particular attention will be paid to making the new cultural programme practical and visible. The mobility and residency programme for artists and cultural practitioners, the new programme to develop computer games for children and young people, and the arts-funding programme will become important new tools in the Nordic culture sector.

The operating conditions of the Nordic Houses will come under scrutiny, as these are important cultural centres for the Nordic Council of Ministers, and their potential as tool of co-operation will be developed. The Nordic Film and Television Fund will also benefit from operational

improvements. The importance of the Nordic Cultural Fund, which supports a diverse range of artistic and cultural experiences, will be emphasised. Finland aims to develop co-operation between the Nordic Cultural Fund and other Nordic Council of Ministers bodies.

Finnish is the main non-Scandinavian language in the Nordic Region. It is important for Finland, and for Nordic co-operation in general, that Finnish expertise is used as widely as possible and that Finnish cultural practitioners have access to Nordic funding mechanisms under the reformed cultural co-operation structures. During the Presidency, proposals arising from the Council of Ministers' study of the status of non-Scandinavian languages will be implemented.

The policies and objectives of the Nordic Council of Ministers in relation to the Adjacent Areas have been refined over the years. In the spring of 2006 the Ministers for Culture (MR-K) adopted two action programmes for cultural co-operation – one for co-operation with North-West Russia and one for co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The main elements of the action programmes will be addressed during the Finnish Presidency. During its Presidency, Finland aims to establish closer contacts between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and the Nordic Region and to emphasise the importance of culture within the EU's Northern Dimension.

Co-operation on children's and young people's issues is a priority for the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Council's aim is to increase opportunities for children and young people to enjoy good living standards and enable them to exert greater influence on their lives.

One effect of the restructuring of the Nordic Council of Ministers will be the clearer integration of a child and youth perspective into action plans in relevant sectors. An important starting point is the Nordic Council of Ministers' cross-sectoral Strategy for Children and Young People adopted by the Ministers for Co-operation (MR-SAM) in March 2006. The rejuvenated Nordic Children's and Youth Committee (NORDBUK) plays a pivotal role in co-ordinating the strategy and following up on its implementation. During the Finnish Presidency, the work of the committee will be guided by a four-year prioritised action plan for 2006–2009.

Finland will focus particular attention on supporting active citizenship among children and young people, and on their social empowerment. Finland also intends to continue the work begun by the Norwegian Presidency on diversity and equality, and to analyse the Nordic welfare model from a children's and young people's perspective. In addition, the aim is to give NORDBUK a greater operational role in relation to cross-sectoral activities.

The governments will continue unofficial but intensive co-operation on sport during the Presidency, and the increasingly important role of voluntary work in this area will also be encouraged.

2 Education and research

Education and research play a central role in establishing a Nordic welfare society that is knowledge-based and equality-conscious, yet remains competitive.

The age demographic is changing in all of the Nordic countries, so we need new solutions in order to maintain a skilled workforce and improve welfare in the workplace. The best way of influencing workplace welfare is to guarantee a high level of education and training for all age groups, and then ensure that the skill levels of the working population are continually improved.

The foundations of lifelong learning must be laid in pre-school and elementary school. As well as being a place of growth, knowledge and learning, the school also encourages mental and social development. It is the duty of the school to impart knowledge, but it must also build up pupils' self-confidence and social skills and promote tolerance. The pupils' willingness to participate and their ability to influence affairs can be improved through a collaborative culture and student-led activities. Particular attention must be paid to transition points between stages of education.

The Finnish Presidency will seek solutions that benefit the general welfare of pupils and promote direct transitions from elementary school to high school and vocational training. The development of post-elementary vocational training will encourage the attainment of both social and economic objectives.

First-class vocational training empowers the individual to function as a skilled professional, and participate in the development of working life in general. Interaction between vocational training and employers, close consultation with workplaces and the active participation of trainees in course development are important for professional development later in life. The welfare of trainees can clearly be improved through better study counselling and student pastoral care.

The Presidency will compare the Nordic countries' experiences in developing interaction between vocational training and the workplace, and assess how trainees participate in this process.

The importance of adult education is increasing in line with the diminishing proportion of the population made up by the younger generation. The continuous improvement of the skill levels of the working-age population is a precondition for long careers and for encouraging ambition and the willingness to work. It is particularly important to provide support and training for adults with poor levels of basic education in order to improve their position in the workforce.

The promotion of adult education courses, particularly among those who seldom participate, requires flexible solutions that take account of the individual's circumstances, backed up by effective guidance and ad-

vice. It also requires closer collaboration between employers and education establishments in order to find appropriate educational models. The traditional Nordic model of popular education offers interesting new solutions for raising the level of public participation in both civic society and the workplace.

The Presidency intends to compare a range of experiences of the impact of adult education on welfare in the workplace. It also intends to examine the models for interaction between adult education and work already in use in the Region.

The Nordic Region has long benefited from increasingly intensive co-operation in higher education and research, and enjoyed the preconditions that have enabled it to become renowned for its high standard of academic achievement. Knowledge, top-class education, creative research and environments conducive to innovation are prerequisites for social development and welfare. International progress requires long-term investment in research and training, as well as the continued development of international research co-operation.

Nordic mobility programmes have made important contributions to improvements in higher education and the growth of co-operation. The Nordic Masters Programme represents a tangible new form of co-operation.

The Finnish Presidency will pay particular attention to the development of IT policies, the Nordplus Mobility Programme and the new Nordic Masters Programme. It is also important to adapt the research infrastructure to meet rapid technological change in the working environment and to assess the impact of information and communication technology on education.

The Presidency intends to support efforts by NordForsk to combine the strengths of the Nordic countries and to improve their visibility. Nordic research training, in Nordic Centre of Excellence programmes and elsewhere, will be subject to revision.

The success of the Nordic Region will continue to depend on a skilled, highly educated workforce. Researcher training, both pre- and post- Doctorate, should be broader and better adapted to the diverse demands of working life. This is a joint task for the universities, the research institutions and the business community.

During the Presidency, the position of NordForsk will be reinforced. The role of research and researcher training will be prioritised, and resources freed up for research will be channelled into NordForsk and implementation of the NordForsk strategy. Finally, the Presidency aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis and assessment of Nordic research and innovation as a whole.

3 The environment

Finland will promote a Nordic policy of environmental protection that takes into account opinions from various sectors. The aim is to increase the Nordic Region's ability to influence EU environmental policies, refine international environmental agreements and make the implementation of requirements and agreements more effective, both globally and in individual Nordic countries.

Finland will emphasise the importance of implementing the EU marine strategy. For example, BONUS-169, the joint research programme of the Baltic Sea countries, offers an opportunity to implement the marine strategy by producing information that will form the basis for practical action. Another aim is to involve Russia in closer co-operation in order to protect the Baltic Sea, for example through HELCOM. The need for a clear division of responsibilities between the EU and the Baltic Sea states will also be highlighted.

Finland will also clarify the role that the Nordic Council of Ministers will play in implementing crucial practical environmental measures. Shipbuilding, safety at sea and technological developments in emissions from shipping are important issues for all Nordic countries, and will have a direct impact on the Baltic Sea, the Northeast Atlantic and the Barents Sea.

During the Presidency, the environment policy's priorities will be determined by the Nordic Council of Ministers' environment programme for 2005–2008. As the programme is implemented, co-operation that transcends individual administrative sectors will be emphasised. Finland will also take account of the Council of Ministers' action plan for the Arctic and the environment sector's Arctic strategy. Nordic methods of affecting and adapting to climate change and the Arctic Council's Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) will also be taken into consideration. Attention will primarily be focused on public planning and the impact of emissions caused by the everyday functioning of society and the adaptability of specific agencies.

During its Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2007 and the Barents Euro Arctic Council 2005–2007, Finland will seek to firm up collaboration on environmental policies between the two regional councils and launch co-operation projects addressing climate issues.

Nordic co-operation on chemicals is well established, its role is recognised and it has achieved good results at both regional and international level. Finland will work to implement REACH, the new EU chemicals regulations, within Nordic government and industrial structures. The Nordic focus will be to provide information and directives to small and medium-sized enterprises.

REACH is based on Europe's adoption of GHS (Global Harmonized System for Labelling of Chemicals). In order to facilitate and promote the

new regulations, the Finnish Presidency will organise a Nordic seminar for private companies, public bodies and other relevant organisations.

The reform of EU chemicals regulations also applies to goods, products and materials. But neither legislation, inspections nor improvements in the treatment of waste take sufficient account of the environmental damage caused by the use of such chemicals. Finland is considering using the Nordic environmental label – the Green Swan – as an appropriate instrument for this purpose. Finland will also seek to clarify the role of customs authorities in monitoring compliance with the regulations, and will instigate co-operation between customs and other inspectorates in the Nordic Region.

Nanotechnology is developing extremely rapidly, and is attracting investment from a variety of sectors. The Presidency will provide support for the development of this new technology, although particular attention must be paid to safety and the possible health and environmental risks. This will require new research, as traditional methods of testing and classifying chemicals are not appropriate for assessing and limiting risks in nanotechnology. By designing new methods and ways of working, the Nordic Region can lead the way, and act as a guide for the international community.

Environmental co-operation with the Baltic States will be further intensified during the Finnish Presidency.

With regards to the Northern Dimension, the emphasis will be on the opportunities offered by the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) and the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB), and encouraging closer co-operation between the two agencies. The co-funding concept introduced by NEFCO will be refined, and the positive outcomes of this innovation will be presented to other institutions in order to assist the development of their environmental financing. The Nordic priority in this area will be small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly in North-West Russia. Another objective will be to secure the participation of the EU financial institutions and the environmental partnership within the Northern Dimension in the work of co-operation between regional councils.

4 Industry and energy policies

Finland intends to put a greater emphasis on market-based innovation. Whereas Finnish innovation is technology-based, Denmark has a greater focus on the market, including, for example, the creative sectors and business services. Finland believes the two approaches should be balanced. The Nordic countries are already learning from each other, and this provides opportunities for closer co-operation.

Consumers will have greater influence upon production and innovation, effectively operating as partners in business development. Con-

sumer-based innovation – in businesses providing leisure pursuits, food and personal services – could be regarded as a separate area in customer-based and user-based projects.

Reform of business models and mastering procedures

New business models and mastery of business procedures are becoming more of a priority in innovation as market demands and technological potential are revealed as critical factors for commercial successes. Nordic business and innovation policies need to adopt these issues as the basis for new entrepreneurial activities and business growth. Business and innovation policy programmes should be combined in the future, and even now they should be regarded as a single entity.

Efficient markets and innovation

Market efficiency and business innovation go hand in hand. Competition forces enterprises to innovate in order to improve their position, and efficient markets best serve consumer interests.

Current work to improve freedom of movement – especially within venture capital and construction – and studies of areas such as food economics are aimed at improving market efficiency in the Nordic Region in order to encourage competitiveness. Finland will promote co-operation with other regional organisations in this area, and stress the importance of these issues within the Northern Dimension.

Energy

During the Finnish Presidency, Nordic co-operation will be focused on the energy market, particularly electricity, in line with the action plan for 2006–2009 adopted by the Nordic Council. The Presidency will focus on sustainable energy systems and greater international co-operation, particularly between the countries in the Baltic Sea Region and the EU, and between Russia, the Nordic Region and other countries.

The Nordic electricity market is currently entering a phase of scarce capacity in years when water supply is normal. The rise in electricity consumption, combined with several other factors, demands an entirely new approach in terms of ensuring sufficient capacity and adjusting the business principles of the energy industry. Finland's aim is that the electricity market and its business principles will continue to be regarded as a model for the EU and the rest of the world.

The Norwegian Presidency began mapping co-operation possibilities on developing the use of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. Finland will continue this work and seek export opportunities for the Nordic Bio-Energy and Energy Efficiency Cluster. The outcome of this

work will determine whether further measures are required. Resources will also be allocated to Nordic Energy Research (NEF), and NEF's co-operation with the EU and other international agencies will continue.

In 1999–2005 the Committee of Senior Officials on Energy Policy (ÄK-E) regularly exchanged information and co-operated with the Russian energy ministry. The Nordic Council of Ministers has maintained and financed this activity through BASREC – the organisation for energy co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region – which was jointly established by the ministers of the Baltic Sea States and the EU Commission. Co-operation between Nordic and North-West Russian energy authorities was started partly through measures taken by ÄK-E, and partly in projects organised between BASREC, the Barents Council and Finland's Ministry of Trade and Industry. In 1998–2004 the Committee of Senior Officials also provided support for the Baltic States' efforts to adapt to EU regulations and directives.

Co-operation with the Baltic States will continue during the Presidency, providing opportunities for them to participate in Nordic co-operation.

In co-operation with Russia, efforts will be made to support the work for improved energy infrastructure in North-West Russia.

Effective Nordic energy co-operation with North-West Russia supports the dialogue on energy between the EU and Russia, and the acquisition of emission allowances through such means as the Testing Ground Facility – a fund for flexible mechanisms of the Kyoto protocol, established as a result of Nordic initiatives by the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation.

5 Economic and fiscal policy

The objective of the Nordic Council of Ministers' economic and fiscal co-operation is to promote stable economic growth and employment. Sustainable development and coping with global challenges require balanced economic and social reform.

Changes in the age structure of the population and the distribution of international production impair economic growth. An ageing population presents a major challenge to the sustainable funding of the public sector. Public expenditure must be held in check and public-sector productivity improved if we are to safeguard welfare services.

A crucial challenge is presented by rapid changes in international patterns of employment, and in the competitive environment of an open-world economy. Competitiveness and productivity can benefit from structural reforms. It is particularly important to increase human capital and to encourage an effective approach to innovation across a range of areas. A

cohesive, properly functioning infrastructure, incorporating efficient financial markets, is an essential prerequisite of growth.

To maintain the Nordic welfare model, fiscal policy must be formulated in such a way that it promotes structural reform, employment and growth. The Nordic Council of Ministers will continue its active debate on economic policy in the Nordic Region, the Adjacent Areas and the EU with a view towards fulfilling these objectives and meeting the challenges referred to above.

The economic and financial sector also has to deal with issues relating to policy within the Northern Dimension. A study of ways in which the Nordic Region could both have more effective influence on and draw greater benefit from its investments in multilateral financial institutions active in the Baltic Sea Region and Adjacent Areas, begun in 2005, should be completed during the Finnish Presidency.

The work of promoting freedom of movement will continue as needed in relation to issues arising as a result of the sector's activities. Taxation issues will continue to be dealt with at ministerial meetings, particularly with a view to promoting information exchanges.

Within Nordic co-operation, more and more attention is being paid to EU affairs. During the Finnish Presidency, information exchanges and debate will continue on issues such as the follow-up to the Lisbon strategy and ongoing developments in the financial markets.

Nordic and Nordic–Baltic co-operation on legislation affecting the securities markets will continue. The aim is to secure the international competitiveness of the Nordic and Baltic securities markets. The Presidency will focus particular attention on Nordic institutions that can help avert financial crises.

The Nordic Economic Group will continue its work and will prepare an overview for the autumn ministerial meeting.

The inter-departmental economy and environment group will deal with economic management techniques in environment policy, and will be responsible for following up on the sector's strategies for sustainable development.

6 Regional policy

Finland will strive to implement the regional policy sector's Nordic co-operation programme for 2005–2008, and the cross-border strategy adopted at the end of 2005. Finland will continue the projects and measures initiated by Norway in 2006.

In accordance with the aims of its overall Presidency programme, Finland's objectives in regional policy co-operation include the promotion of regional competitiveness and innovation, guaranteeing basic services for the population and developing the Northern Dimension by strengthening

regional co-operation. With regard to the latter, Finland will focus upon regional policy co-operation between the Nordic Region and the Baltic States, and improve division of labour and co-ordination between the cross-border co-operation work supported by the EU and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

During its Presidency, Finland will seek to act in accordance with the general principles and organisational objectives of the Nordic Council of Ministers in regional policy co-operation. Finland will review the role of cross-border regional organisations in reducing border barriers. Finland will also play an active role in ensuring the successful restructuring of the Nordic Council of Ministers, which began at the start of 2006, by paying particular attention to co-operation between the regional, business and energy sectors.

Closer co-operation with the Baltic States

It has long been the goal of Nordic co-operation on regional policy to increase contacts and co-operation with the Baltic States. Tangible outcomes so far include the project to support cross-border co-operation between the Baltic States, which was launched during the previous Finnish Presidency (later continued as the BEN project, which was later partly financed by the EU), the database of regional development in the Baltic States established and maintained by Nordregio, and the in-service training of regional planners organised by Nordregio.

However, regular and organised co-operation has not proceeded as had been hoped even if recent years have seen a great deal of bilateral contact and co-operation on EU programmes. Closer co-operation is required in both the Norden Plus initiative, part of the regional policy co-operation programme, and the promotion of cross-border co-operation in and with the Baltic States and Russia.

Finland will initiate regular co-operation between authorities and establish contacts between the Nordic and Baltic authorities for regional development.

Implementation and clarification of the strategy for cross-border co-operation

In the autumn of 2005, the Nordic Ministers for Regional Development adopted a new strategy for cross-border regional co-operation, prepared by the Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (ÄK-R). The objective is to connect more clearly the Nordic Council of Ministers' support for cross-border co-operation with the strategic priorities of Nordic co-operation, and to adopt a more flexible approach to the allocation of resources.

This new approach requires better follow-up measures and agreement upon progress indicators. At the end of 2005, the Committee of Senior Officials decided to introduce the new procedure gradually during budget years 2007–2008. Implementation of the system was prepared during the Norwegian Presidency, but it will be tested in practice during the Finnish Presidency. Finland intends to ensure that the new system is rolled out smoothly.

The new EU-financed programmes for regional co-operation will be launched during 2006–2007, continuing the work of the 2000–2006 Interreg programmes. Under the new programme, the relationship of the Nordic cross-border co-operation bodies to the EU programme will be partially changed. Their new role will be a central theme of the joint meeting of Senior Official Committees and cross-border organisations, which is being organised for the summer of 2007.

Finland will seek to secure the role of Nordregio as a Nordic and international knowledge center for cross-border regional co-operation.

Information gathering and experience exchanges

The other pillar of Nordic regional policy co-operation consists of joint research into the conditions characteristic of the Nordic Region, and the exchange of experiences between countries and regions.

Finland considers the Nordregio research institution as a central resource for Nordic regional policy co-operation, and will seek to support and enhance its role in every way.

Finland believes the exchange of experiences on regional development issues has resulted in a great deal of Nordic synergy over the years. However, in recent years it has not been utilised to its full potential, so there are grounds for considering how exchanges could be made more effective. One possibility will be to make more effective use of Nordregio as a transmitter of experiences. Finland wants to enhance dialogue between the Committee of Senior Officials and Nordregio in order to define the content and form of this co-operation. With Nordregio's help, Finland intends to run at least two workshops for exchanging experiences on selected topics.

During 2007, EU/EEA issues will continue to be dealt with in meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials. Additional working groups (Interreg and state funding) will be activated as and when required and new ad-hoc groups set up if necessary.

Information gathering and experience exchanges will place particular emphasis on regional innovation, urban/cluster policy (using the Baltic Sea Region as the frame of reference), and the development of local and regional authority service structures.

Finland will continue to manage the key project begun by Norway for regional innovation policy, and assess whether new projects on this theme are required.

The urban-policy working group set up in 2005 should, under its current mandate, conclude its work towards the end of 2006. Finland believes it would be appropriate to continue to exchange information and experiences of urban policy, and that it may also be necessary to initiate studies and research projects on this theme. Taking into account the results of the current projects and other relevant factors, a decision will be made on this, and further work defined, at the beginning of 2007. It is likely that so-called development clusters will be central to future work. Finland also intends to extend its scope to the whole of the Baltic Sea Region.

In recent years most Nordic countries have carried out extensive studies on how best to protect basic welfare services and reorganise future regional business and development policies. Finland will focus on exchanging information about adapting local and regional administrative structures so that they are better equipped to meet the needs and challenges of the future.

Finland will also examine demographic developments, specifically the impact of an ageing population on regional development and the challenges this presents for regional policy. The gender perspective will also be taken into consideration.

In recent years the regional-policy sector has commissioned a number of research projects on sustainable development, which arose from separate co-operation between planning authorities. It is the intention of the Finnish Presidency to evaluate the results of these projects and determine whether further study is required.

7 Agriculture and forestry, fisheries and food

Rural policy

The NordFram project – ‘The future of Nordic agriculture and historic landscapes’ – laid the groundwork for the exchange of experience at senior official level. The scope of the project was determined at a ministerial meeting in Akureyri in 2004. The objective was to promote Nordic co-operation, build networks, establish projects and take the initiative on agriculture and historic landscapes, including general countryside development. The ten-strong NordFram group is made up of officials from the five Nordic ministries of agriculture. The final project report will be submitted and a concluding seminar held in spring 2007.

Agricultural research

The Nordic Joint Committee for Agricultural Research (NKJ) is the co-operation agency for Nordic organisations that finance agricultural research. Its task is to instigate and monitor high-level research projects and networks. NKJ also advises the Nordic Council of Ministers on agricultural research policy.

Finland will chair NKJ in 2006–2009. The aim of the Finnish Presidency is to improve NKJ's efficiency through a new strategy and working methods. Given the nature of Nordic agriculture and food production, there is a clear need to improve the conditions for co-operation in research. The new strategy will be presented in the spring of 2007 and it will outline the means of achieving these objectives. It will also set out the research themes that will be NKJ's priorities during this period.

During 2007, NKJ will arrange a Nordic seminar on historic landscapes in collaboration with the Nordic Gene Bank and NordFram.

Forestry

Finland will continue the Nordic exchange of experiences on national forestry programmes – which are continually updated in Finland – and will seek to promote a sustainable approach to the forestry industry. The use of wood as biomass will be encouraged and co-operation on climate change and compensation for windfall damage will be continued. Dialogue between the forestry industry and schools will also continue.

The Nordic Council for Forest Reproductive Material (NSFP) is planning a Nordic seminar for 2007. NSFP promotes the exchange of information, practical experiences and viewpoints on all aspects of forest renewal.

Forest research

The Nordic Forest Research Co-operation Committee (SNS) is the co-operation body for organisations that finance forest research. Finland will chair SNS 2006–2009. Its main task is the promotion of research in socially, economically and ecologically responsible forestry. It also advises the Nordic Council of Ministers on forestry and forest research issues.

SNS' remit includes forest conservation, forests and other areas planted with trees, the utilisation of wood and other forestry products, and the non-commercial value of forests. The aim of the Finnish Presidency is to re-evaluate this body's strategy, to find synergies in the joint use of forestry resources and make best use of the opportunities provided by the EU research framework programme for forestry in the Nordic Region and Adjacent Areas.

Fisheries

The aim of the Finnish Presidency is to fortify the position of the Baltic Sea Council and enhance its profile in Nordic co-operation. The Presidency would like to see more effective management of the grey seal population and a reduction in the damage done by cormorants to fish stocks, fish farming and other coastal businesses.

The Baltic Sea is an important fishing ground, even though it yields fewer species and catches are modest when compared with the Atlantic. Three member states and a self-governing territory border the Baltic Sea, and the Nordic Council of Ministers has stepped up co-operation with the Baltic States and Russia. The major part of the Baltic Sea is already within the EU, but Nordic fisheries co-operation still has an important role to play.

Until the mid-20th century the Baltic seal population was held back by winter hunting on the ice and by some hunting in the outer archipelago during the summer months. The number of seals fell sharply in the 1960s due to breeding problems brought on by environmental factors. This resulted in protection measures, but after the crisis the seal population recovered and is now larger than ever. Since the population is not actually being reduced, it is multiplying and causing great damage to fisheries and fish farming. A proactive conservation programme could stabilise the seal population while ensuring that this renewable natural resource is exploited. The seals might also recover the bashfulness characteristic of their species.

To return seal populations to normal levels necessitates the establishment of political preconditions, followed by the drawing up of modern guidelines for all parts of the process, from hunting to the marketing of products. Nordic co-operation should initiate a project to:

- 1) study how the seal could best be exploited within current legislation
- 2) study existing seal products and determine demand for them, and
- 3) collate and edit the information required to process seal products.

Information can be gathered from parts of the Nordic Region where the seal continues to be used for commercial purposes, from project documentation and from historical sources.

The cormorant has increased its numbers sharply in the Baltic Sea in recent years. Ornithological studies downplay the damage done by cormorants to fisheries, fish farming and tourism, but those who run coastal businesses and make their living from the archipelago often take a different view. The cormorant is found throughout the Nordic Region and the time has come to take measures to limit the damage it causes.

Food industry

Since the end of the 1970s the Nordic countries have worked together to develop common Nordic nutritional guidelines and apply them to national recommendations. The latest guidelines, from 2004, stress the importance of exercise for health. Finland will continue this work.

The case for common programmes and recommendations is that people in the Nordic Region have a similar mindset, their health and nutrition guidelines are similar, and to a certain extent they face similar health and nutritional problems. Since the factors affecting lifestyle are associated with local conditions, policies and culture, we enjoy a great advantage in that our countries are so similar and so close to each other geographically. It means that the Nordic programmes are strong even by comparison with programmes at the European level.

The Nordic programmes also benefit from a clear relation to EU programmes on nutrition, exercise and health policies, and to World Health Organisation strategies.

Like other countries, Finland is concerned about the rise in obesity, especially among children and young people. While efforts continue to find ways of reversing this trend, attention must be paid to the importance of diet and exercise in preventing the most common illnesses. For example, an unhealthy diet and lack of exercise is a cause of Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer even in people who are not overweight. The objective of the programmes should be to reduce all common preventable illnesses and to promote good health.

Promotion of Nordic food culture

The New Nordic Food project is based on a declaration issued by the Nordic Council of Ministers at its summer meeting in Århus in 2005. The aim of the project is to improve the visibility of Nordic cuisine and food culture, both in the Nordic Region and around the world. The planned three-year project aims to raise the profile of the region's cooking and improve the competitive position of its produce.

New Nordic cuisine is based on natural produce, safety, freshness, simplicity and ethical production. It takes account of things such as seasonal change and promotes sustainable production. The aim is to combine the best Nordic food traditions and raw materials with new cooking concepts, resulting in a healthy, appetising, recognisable and attractive cuisine. Finland will continue work on this project.

Contingency plans for animal infections

In 2004 work began on Nordic co-operation on the prevention of infectious animal diseases. As a result, a contingency management exercise dealing with foot and mouth disease was carried out in the autumn of 2005. In the spring of 2006 the Nordic Council of Ministers received a

project application outlining plans to continue co-operation on contingencies, develop Nordic contingency planning and study the viability of recruiting veterinary staff and sourcing material resources from the other Nordic countries in times of crisis. It also proposed exchanges of experience of best practice. Bird flu is the most pressing concern, so co-operation will concentrate on preventing it. A joint Nordic contingency management exercise on bird flu will take place in 2007. Finland believes it is important that this co-operation should continue and that ways are found to involve the Baltic States.

8 Consumer policy

The restructuring of the Nordic Council of Ministers means that from 2006 there will no longer be official meetings of the Ministers for Consumer Affairs. The Nordic Committee of Senior Officials on consumer affairs also concluded its work at the end of 2005.

Their work will continue through unofficial Nordic co-operation on consumer issues, led by officials with responsibility for consumer affairs from the relevant Nordic ministries. Special co-operation networks are functioning in certain areas, such as product safety and standardisation and follow-up of EU consumer-protection regulations, as are specific project groups. In addition, consumer groups and researchers have their own Nordic co-operation networks.

The current Nordic co-operation programme for consumer affairs in 2005–2010 took effect in September 2004, and consumer-related activities continue to be based on that programme. The Nordic Council's Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee receives updates on the programme's implementation as and when necessary.

The aim of the programme is to create proactive consumers who feel safe and secure no matter where they live. Its central objective is to improve consumer protection in the Nordic Region and elsewhere in Europe, and expand the knowledge base necessary for consumers to make free choices and decisions.

The Presidency also intends to focus on consumer issues arising from cross-border sales and marketing. This includes co-operation with legislative and other consumer-policy projects in the EU, and the implementation of EU regulations in the Nordic Region. Project work will focus on the challenges presented by new technology, new commercial techniques, new markets and market integration. Particular attention will be paid to co-operation on the monitoring of markets. Ethical consumer issues and the social responsibilities of business will also be addressed in the context of globalisation.

The Presidency will also stress the need to raise levels of knowledge among consumers in both newly liberalised markets and the welfare sector, where consumer choice is increasing.

9 Social and health policy

In continuing the work of restructuring Nordic co-operation begun by Denmark, Finland will focus on social and health policy.

There are several joint Nordic education and research institutions in the social and health sector. Their competitiveness and working practices are to be revitalised so that they will be in a better position to cope with new and changing demands in the sector. Their administration will be streamlined if necessary, and working methods more appropriate to new forms of flexible networking will be introduced. Finland will also promote exchanges of information, experience and practical expertise across the Nordic Region.

The strategic goals of project activities will be made clearer, evaluations will be more efficient and results will be more widely disseminated.

The programme goals adopted by the Nordic Region should have a demonstrable practical impact on the co-operation. They should also encourage discussion on the best working practices.

Co-operation in the social and health sector

In the social and health sector the main themes of the Presidency will be the ageing population and children and young people.

It is important to offer support to elderly people and to focus on their functional capabilities. Well-educated, healthy senior citizens are an important resource for society and have a lot to offer NGOs and civic society. Investing in active elderly people will also reduce the cost of care and nursing facilities. Finland wants to encourage Nordic-level debate on the best way to support the elderly and encourage them to play an active role in society.

The ageing population constitutes a growing challenge for the Nordic social and healthcare system. Together with NSH – Nordic Co-operation on Disability – Finland will commission a study of the circumstances and needs of elderly people with disabilities. The results will be presented at a conference. Finland will also consider the possibility of establishing a Nordic research network on this theme.

Another important theme will be the creation of an environment conducive to the development of children and young people. In addition to basic financial security, we must ensure that children and young people are healthy and have equal opportunities to influence and participate in society. Specifically, Finland hopes to encourage a debate on the chal-

lenges facing the maternity and child welfare clinics and the school healthcare systems. The Presidency will play an active role in implementing the Council of Ministers' inter-departmental strategy 'Children and Young People in the Nordic Region'.

The work of promoting freedom of movement in the Nordic Region will continue for example through the development of various forms of social support for students, alongside increased co-operation between authorities and greater access to information for students.

The theme of the annual meeting of Ministers for Health and Social Services (MR-S) will be a comparison of healthcare financing and service systems in the Nordic Region. In recent years the Nordic countries' healthcare systems have evolved from vastly different starting points, and experiences of this process will be discussed.

The initiatives of previous presidencies on drug abuse, alcohol policy and contingency management will be continued. The objective is to actively seek co-operation on vaccines and responses to pandemics. Joint Nordic responses to rare diseases will continue to be refined, and work will also continue on the use of information and communications technology in healthcare (including e-prescriptions). The implementation of the Nordic action programme 'Design for All' will be followed up.

Co-operation with the Adjacent Areas will prioritise the promotion of healthy lifestyles among children and young people.

The Finnish Presidency will co-operate with the Barents Council and the Northern Dimension partnership for health and social welfare on matters concerning the Adjacent Areas. Finland will organise the final seminar for the first part-project of the Barents HIV/AIDS programme, which will discuss topics such as the running of the programme and the results of low-threshold reception services. Working with the Northern Dimension's partnership for health and social welfare partnership, Finland will arrange a conference on the prevention of social exclusion and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. The primary interests are in the prevention of alcohol abuse, encouraging a healthy and socially rewarding lifestyle among young people, and ensuring health and safety at work.

10 Equality policy

The equality policy priorities of the Finnish Presidency will be based on the 2006–2010 Nordic programme for equality. The central themes of the programme are gender and power, and gender and young people.

Gender and power

From an equality perspective it is essential to reconcile working life with family responsibilities. The division of the labour market into sectors and professions that are dominated by either men or women is changing at an

extremely slow pace, and this presents a problem for equality on several counts. In Finland, particular attention has been drawn to the uneven distribution of parental-leave costs between industries characterised by male or female dominance. This issue will be considered in the context of the welfare model in the Nordic equality debate, and a conference will be arranged in conjunction with the meeting of the Ministers for Equality. The theme of the Ministers' meeting will be the role of women in economic decision-making.

Gender and young people

Over a number of years Finland has evolved a model for gender-based youth work, which places great emphasis on promoting equality. Now answers are being sought to the question of how this model can be integrated into youth work. Finland will continue the 'gender and young people' theme begun by Norway, which is also included in the Council of Ministers' Strategy for Children and Young People.

Mainstreaming

Finland will emphasise the continuous refining of processes to integrate a gender perspective, and will examine the extent to which Nordic public bodies promote mainstreaming. A mainstreaming seminar will be held for the Finnish chairpersons of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Committees of Senior Officials.

Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research (NIKK)

Several major equality projects, spanning a number of years, concluded during the Norwegian Presidency in 2006. During the Finnish Presidency, guidelines will be drawn up for practical measures to implement the co-operation programme's priorities, and in this context it is important that co-operation and dialogue with the Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research (NIKK) is improved. Particular attention will be paid to the need for more information on NIKK's activities in Finnish.

Co-operation in Adjacent Areas

Co-operation in the Adjacent Areas will focus on activities in the Barents Region and North-West Russia. During the Finnish Presidency co-operation on combating prostitution and trafficking in women will continue between the Council of Ministers and the Northern Dimension partnership for health and social welfare.

11 Labour market and the working environment

The Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation on the labour market and working environment is based on the co-operation programme 2005–

2008, and on the more specific annual action plans prepared by sub-committees of the Committee of Senior Officials for Labour and the Work Environment (ÄK-A). The aim of the co-operation is to ensure an ample labour force and full employment, limit problems in the working environment, develop labour-market mechanisms and encourage interaction between Nordic workplace policies and the EU, the EEA and other international forums.

The recurring themes of the Presidency will be labour resources, the relationship between labour supply and demand, the quality of working life and the impact of internationalisation and globalisation on the labour market.

Finland will also continue to pursue themes developed by previous presidencies, particularly with regard to the impact of demographic shifts on labour supply and mechanisms for preventing exclusion and promoting integration in the labour market. Representatives of labour-market organisations have a role to play in the work of sub-committees of the Committee of Senior Officials, and as such they will be invited to contribute to seminars during the Presidency.

In order to ensure economic growth and the provision of welfare services, it is important to increase levels of employment and increase the supply of labour. As reserves of labour shrink and structural changes resulting from globalisation continue, productivity becomes centrally important in securing economic progress and welfare.

In the long term, higher productivity will improve the competitive position of enterprises and help maintain and increase the number of jobs. In a situation in which the labour force is shrinking and ageing, it is important that productivity is raised in a qualitatively sustainable manner, so that it is able to support welfare in the workplace, help the individual to value their work and extend working life.

The Presidency's main focus in this area will be on improving the quality of working life in order to raise productivity.

Impact of EU enlargement, mobility and job centres

The exchange of information and experience on the impact of EU enlargement on the Nordic labour markets has been a central theme of Nordic co-operation on the labour market, employment law and the working environment in recent years. The Presidency will continue these exchanges and expand them, so that they not only address issues of mobility, but also cover problems arising from the relocation of production, enterprises and services. It is also important to analyse how the Nordic labour market is adapting to globalisation and how it fares when production is partially relocated to countries with lower labour costs.

In 2007 the exchange of information between the Nordic Region, the Baltic States and Poland on current EU issues and the effects of EU en-

largement will continue. Finland also intends to hold a tripartite Nordic–Baltic–Polish conference on the effects of EU enlargement on the labour market.

Nordic co-operation on the interpretation and implementation of EU regulations will continue in order to avoid unnecessary new barriers to freedom of movement in Nordic labour markets.

Job centres need to be developed and improved throughout the Nordic Region. It is important for both national and Nordic progress to share information and experiences on organisational changes, provision of services and the significance of e-services, and in particular to co-operate with employers and other agencies. The development of a Nordic on-line job centre is just one aspect of this.

Welfare and the will to work

In order to promote welfare at work, the Nordic countries have introduced important reforms that differ from each other in some respects. Procedures have become more holistic, legislation has been modernised and co-operation between authorities adjusted accordingly. Attitudes in the workplace have changed and welfare at work is now regarded as an important aspect of productivity. Finland's aim is to utilise the Nordic co-operation to improve welfare in the workplace and make working life more attractive.

Efforts will be made during the Presidency to reduce violence and psychological problems in the workplace, prevent muscular and skeletal ailments and cut the number of accidents at work. Co-operation between organisations responsible for employee protection will be stepped up in order to maximise the impact of protective measures. Finland will also continue the work on reducing absenteeism through illness begun by the Danish Presidency.

Co-operation on the working environment

Working-environment co-operation is based on the Nordic Working Environment Convention of 1989. Working-environment policies and the promotion of good working conditions in practice have changed considerably since the convention was adopted. In addition to the modifications to basic working-environment policies resulting from European integration, core issues, methods and forms of activity have changed. Therefore, the importance and necessity of the convention in its current form will be examined. The objective is to modernise Nordic co-operation on the working environment so that it is better equipped to meet future requirements.

EU working-environment strategy also plays a major role in the Nordic Region and in Nordic co-operation. The principles of sustainable de-

velopment are closely related to targeted policies for the working environment. Nordic co-operation will analyse any new developments in order to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of various policy procedures and measures.

Improving the effectiveness of the Committee of Senior Officials

During the Norwegian Presidency, it was agreed that the effectiveness of the Committee of Senior Officials for Labour and the Work Environment (ÄK-A), as well as its sub-committees, should be improved, partly in order to revitalise the sub-committee structure. In the labour-market and work-environment sectors, the focus should be on work-related immigration and the integration of immigrants into working life. As the sub-committee on immigration will be abolished in 2006, these issues need to be integrated into the work of all remaining sub-committees. In addition, greater emphasis will be placed on ad-hoc co-operation, in order to ensure that important current policy issues can be dealt with more effectively.

12 Legislation

Nordic legislative co-operation goes back a long way, and has enabled the Nordic Region to promote groundbreaking common legislative principles based on shared values. The objective is for national legislation to resemble each other more closely, so as to improve freedom of movement and facilitate contact between Nordic citizens. This is long-term work, and is based on practical projects, joint Nordic working groups and unofficial co-operation between officials.

Legislative co-operation between the Nordic Ministers for Justice is based on a programme of co-operation adopted on 21st June 2005, which stipulates the top priorities and administrative framework.

Nordic co-operation in international judicial organisations is another important element – for example, the Nordic Ministers for Justice and their ministries are working closely with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on both civil and criminal law issues.

Traditionally, a large part of legislative co-operation has to do with civil law, and work on revising the Nordic convention on inheritance, carried out by the Nordic working group on family law, is set to continue. In recent years, however, co-operation has become more focused on criminal law and implementation issues.

The Presidency will emphasise the issues outlined below.

Europeanization of the legal culture and the Nordic view on improving legislation

Internationalisation and developments in EU law, including decisions by EU and European courts on human rights issues, are having an effect on Nordic legal affairs. The significance of this trend needs to be evaluated in the context of Nordic legal culture and uniformity of legislation. It also needs to be established whether there is a common Nordic perspective on various EU projects for better regulation. There are also grounds for investigating the effectiveness of practical Nordic co-operation, what legislative techniques are being used to implement EU regulations at national level, and what legislative guidelines are being drawn up in the Nordic Region, for use both nationally and in relation to the EU and other international bodies.

To discuss these issues, a high-level seminar or meeting of senior officials will be held during the Presidency, drawing on the experience gained by Finland during its Presidency of the EU.

Nordic crime policy – ideals and reality

The Nordic Region has seen major reforms in the treatment of offenders recently. It would be useful to have an overview of recent developments in crime policy at the Nordic level, with particular focus on penalty systems in the region, and a study of whether it is possible to identify a specifically Nordic crime-policy model.

In addition to the above, it is also intended that seminars and meetings should be held to exchange experiences on issues related to the treatment of offenders. These include managing the prison population by such methods as early conditional release (electronic tagging), measures to combat alcohol and drug abuse, including care of abusers, prison work as an element of employment policy, and the particular problems of foreigners and members of ethnic communities in prisons.

Nordic project to combat violence

A multi-part project covering research, studies and seminars on violence was carried out in 2006. It compared violence arising under different circumstances in the Nordic countries and mapped out current national policies and best practice for reducing violence. A seminar will analyse the results following the project's conclusion in 2007, after which a decision will be made on whether to continue this work.

Greater efficiency when following up judgements – computerised collection

The Presidency intends to study how the Nordic convention on collecting maintenance payments is applied in practice, and whether it needs to be revised. In the long term there are benefits in computerising the collection of money owed to the public sector and of maintenance payments. In Finland, the system of collecting money due to the public sector has largely been computerised, but as maintenance payment amounts are relatively variable they are not yet collected in this way.

The Presidency will take this matter forward by assessing the current situation in the Nordic Region and promoting any existing national objectives, such as the development of e-solutions.

13 Unofficial and other Nordic co-operation

Transport

Official Nordic transport co-operation previously covered infrastructure issues, road safety and research, co-ordination of wider international co-operation and developments in the Adjacent Areas. The general objective was to promote efficient, competitive, safe, sustainable and egalitarian transport in the Nordic Region. Co-operation will continue on an unofficial basis under the guidance of the transport ministers.

Housing and construction policy

Co-operation in this area is focused on housing and urban-planning policies, sustainable development of the housing and construction industries, and more effective sharing of information. The aim is to exchange experiences and develop joint Nordic methods and solutions that can be applied to national housing and construction policy. Particular attention will be paid to improving and co-ordinating housing and construction statistics.

High construction costs are a problem in several countries, and an action plan has been drawn up to assess how well the construction market functions and to improve its competitiveness. A study is also being made of how information might be exchanged more effectively between the Nordic countries, and between them and the Baltic States and Poland. The objective is to find ways of reducing costs and improving competition in the industry without sacrificing quality. It is anticipated that this work will continue for some years.

Emergencies

The heads of the Nordic emergency services meet twice a year, with the first meeting devoted to rescue services and the second to crisis management. The meetings address current issues with the aim of improving mutual co-operation.

Finland will chair the Nordred co-operation group from May 2006 until June 2009.

Nordred co-operation is based on a Nordic agreement from 1989, covering co-operation and back-up in emergency situations.

Nordred is responsible for the practical implementation of the agreement and for keeping it updated. It meets at least twice a year, with separate working groups set up to deal with issues that require more in-depth study. Finland is represented by the emergency services section of the Ministry of the Interior, Sweden by the Swedish Rescue Services Agency, Norway by the Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning and the Joint Rescue Co-ordination Centre for Southern Norway, Denmark by the Danish Emergency Management Agency and the National Police, and Iceland by the National Commissioner of Police. The Nordred website is maintained by the Swedish Rescue Services Agency.

At the end of its period in the chair of Nordred, Finland will stage a major conference to discuss the need to improve co-operation on emergency services. The last conference was held in Reykjavik 3–5 May, and the next one will take place in Finland in May–June 2009. The Nordic Council of Ministers funds the Nordred conferences.

The Reykjavik conference discussed, among other things, practical procedures relating to requests between countries for emergency assistance, the suitability of the emergency agencies' radio and computer systems, the use of these systems in emergencies and their readiness to accept assistance. During the Finnish period in the chair of Nordred, discussions will also be held on the role of agreements on international assistance, particularly in connection with the EU emergency-services system and the agreement on emergency services that is being prepared for the Barents Region.

Nordic police co-operation

The Nordic police commissioners meet annually. Their co-operation is based on a 2002 Nordic agreement and a supplementary agreement signed in 2004. There is also an agreement that took effect in 2003, between the relevant ministries and authorities in Finland, Sweden and Norway on the application of articles 40 and 41 of the convention on implementation of the Schengen Agreement. In 2005 the police commissioners adopted a Nordic memorandum of understanding on DVI (Disaster Victim Identification)

In 2004 the commissioners decided that co-operation should be extended to civil policing. Meetings of working groups have discussed such issues as arrangements for major public events.

Nordic police co-operation has developed in parallel with other types of international co-operation. In order to improve synergy between the many different forums of co-operation, police co-operation requires decisions to be made on common themes and the precise relationships of the various forums need to be clarified. Further measures will be debated on the basis of a report published in August 2006. PTN (Nordic Police and Customs against Drugs) co-operation is being developed in a working group set up by the police commissioners. The chair of PTN does not rotate along with the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Unofficial co-operation on drug abuse

The Council of Ministers for Drugs Issues (MR-Narko) was abolished at the beginning of 2006, during the reorganisation of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Committee of Senior Officials on drugs issues decided that inter-departmental co-operation on drugs policy should continue through the Nordic Drugs Forum.

The aim of this co-operation is to share experiences of best practice. A network of experts and national representatives will be charged with defining the issues to be addressed at a Nordic level. Co-operation with the Adjacent Areas will proceed on a project basis.

The chair of the Nordic Drugs Forum rotates along with the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. In addition to the customary exchanges of experiences, the Finnish Presidency will highlight minority issues in the Nordic Region and the Adjacent Areas. Co-operation will continue with the Barents Council and the Northern Dimension partnership for health and social welfare.

The Nordic Council for Alcohol and Drug Research (NAD) is located in Helsinki and answers to the Nordic Council of Ministers. Its work seeks to promote co-operation on sociological research into drugs and alcohol abuse. During the Finnish Presidency, NAD, in collaboration with SIRUS (the Norwegian Institute for Alcohol and Drug Research), will arrange an international seminar on the evaluation of drugs policies, to be held in Oslo, 22–23 March 2007. NAD will also highlight other topical drug-related issues.

Nordic health emergency co-operation

The Nordic Ministers for Health signed a Nordic agreement on emergency health planning 14 June 2002.

The agreement commits the Nordic countries to reciprocal co-operation on health and social services in crises and disaster situations,

subject to national needs. The participating countries' obligations include keeping each other informed of measures taken, providing information on changes in their emergency-response systems and promoting co-operation through removing obstacles in national legislation, exchanging experiences and collaborating on training and exercises.

The agreement links emergency health planning with co-operation through the Nordic Council of Ministers. A working group produces an annual report for the purposes set out in Article 5 of the agreement. The country holding the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers is responsible for presenting the report and providing an account of its contents to the Committee of Senior Officials on social and health policy at their annual meeting in the autumn.

Immigration and citizenship issues

There is no Nordic Council of Ministers for immigration issues. Denmark has previously proposed that a council for these issues should be set up, but the suggestion did not win support from the other Nordic countries. It was argued that immigration issues in the other Nordic countries were dealt with by several different ministries. In Finland, for example, the interior, labour and foreign affairs ministries all have responsibilities in this area. Denmark has a dedicated Ministry of Refugees, Immigration and Integration Affairs.

Membership of the EU means that immigration and asylum policies are decided in part by the EU. During its Presidency of the Nordic Council in 2007, Finland intends to continue the preparation and practical application of a wide-ranging, humane policy on immigration. In November 2004 the Council of Europe adopted the Hague Programme for the creation of a European area of freedom, security and justice in the years 2005–2010. A report on the Hague Programme will be submitted during the Presidency.

Refugee policy

The EU has adopted what are known as the first-stage minimum norms for asylum-seekers and refugees. As a consequence, it is now necessary to monitor how the common European asylum system can best be developed and then to determine what regulations are needed in the second stage. In the autumn of 2006 the EU Commission will outline how the directive should be applied and how best to allocate responsibilities. Following the report, the Nordic Region will hold an internal debate on the direction in which the Dublin Convention should develop.

The common European asylum system will demand improved practical co-operation and more effective exchanges of information between the official bodies responsible for refugees. The Nordic Region has a contribution to make to this work.

Immigration policy

The EU Commission produced a report on legal immigration at the end of 2005. This document outlines economic migration over the course of several years, covering the immigration of highly trained workers, seasonal workers and trainees. Nordic ministers with responsibility for immigration and refugee issues have emphasised the importance of this issue.

In parallel with decisions being made at national level on the quantity and quality of immigrant labour, the need for common procedures is also being emphasised. Given its ageing population, among other factors, the Nordic Region should consider the benefits of attracting labour, including highly educated individuals, from abroad.

In July the Commission issued a memorandum on measures to combat illegal immigration. It is important to examine this phenomenon within the context of constantly changing business conditions, and it is also related to a range of other current issues. The memo covers visa policies, border controls, relations with third countries and document security, and also refers to people-trafficking issues.

The Commission's proposal for a directive on repatriation of third-country citizens illegally residing in the EU will be dealt with appropriately.

The Commission also presented a proposal for a second-generation information system for the Schengen Agreement (SIS II and the new visa information system, VIS). Visa issues in terms of the Schengen regulations are the same across all Nordic countries. In July the Commission presented a proposal for visa regulation and a partial revision of the joint consular guidelines.

Negotiations have taken place on a re-admission agreement, and further discussions between the Nordic countries are expected to take place in the future.

Following a report published by the Global Commission on International Migration in October 2005, many international forums are now looking at the links between migration and development. For example, a high-level dialogue on international migration and development was held in conjunction with the UN General Assembly meeting during September 2006.

The EU Council for General Affairs and External Relations adopted a common position on this issue in July 2006. The EU Commission issued a memo as a basis for debate in May 2006. From a Nordic perspective, the main challenge is to follow up on this debate, particularly with regard to issues affecting more effective management of international migration.

Citizenship

As far as citizenship issues are concerned, the Nordic countries exchange statistics and information on legislation and administration in the citizen-

ship co-operation group, which meets annually. It was the turn of Finland to take the rotating chair of the group in 2006.

The Nordic countries have an agreement on citizenship issues. Norway, Sweden and Denmark entered into an agreement on the implementation of certain regulations in 1950. Finland joined the agreement in 1969, and Iceland in 1998. The purpose of this agreement is to make it easier for a citizen of a country that is party to the agreement to acquire citizenship in another participating country. This agreement has been revised three times, and further revisions have recently come under discussion, as the text no longer corresponds with national regulations. A special working group under Norwegian leadership is preparing a proposal for a new text. The new agreement should be ready for adoption in 2007.

Nordic Joint Advisory Group on Refugee Policy

The Nordic Joint Advisory Group on Refugee Policy (NSHF) meets twice a year, a ministerial council coinciding with the second meeting. The purpose of these meetings is to exchange information on a range of issues that have an impact on immigration. The Joint Advisory Group has set up separate working groups to discuss specific issues, including the working group on relocation and return.

Development aid

Nordic co-operation on development aid is particularly close. A central objective for all the countries is to promote the development targets outlined in the UN Millennium Declaration for the elimination of extreme poverty from the world.

In recent years the focus of development-aid co-operation has been very much on effectiveness and harmonisation. In 2005 the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) approved the Paris Declaration on the effectiveness of aid, a central aim of which is to promote harmonisation among aid providers in order to avoid overlaps and streamline collaboration, thereby freeing up resources. The Nordic Region has a great deal of experience in this area and has a significant contribution to make to the implementation of the declaration, primarily by virtue of its focus on best practice.

Co-operation has been particularly effective in what is known as the Nordic+ Group (the Nordic Region plus the Netherlands, Ireland and the UK). With joint planning for headquarters, field and global activities, Nordic+ has enjoyed considerable success in harmonising aid. First and foremost, the group is operational and able to implement measures not covered by other international initiatives but clearly required at national level. As early as 2002, for example, the Nordic Region took the initiative in launching Harmonisation in Practice in Zambia, which was subsequently extended to cover all aid providers.

The Nordic Ministers for Development Aid meet twice a year to discuss issues such as implementation of the Paris Declaration, meeting harmonisation requirements, the most effective measures to combat corruption, reforming international aid structures and the difficulties of increasing the level of global financial aid. Other current issues include debt cancellation, direct aid payments to developing countries' budgets and the division of responsibilities between aid providers.

The Nordic+ development-aid co-operation calls for the heads of departments to meet twice a year, in addition to numerous meetings at senior official level. Nordic aid experts work together effectively and efficiently, actively co-operating on, for example, human rights, equality and social and environmental issues.

In addition, Nordic equality advisers have discussed guidelines for equality in development-aid policies, newly completed gender evaluations and Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

The countries in Nordic+ co-operate in the OECD/DAC and contribute to the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, which monitors implementation of the Paris Declaration. Finland, Sweden and Denmark pursue the objectives of the Nordic+ group in the EU.

The Nordic countries act collectively when dealing with the leadership of the World Bank and regional development bodies (such as the African, Asian and Latin-American Development Banks). Finland will act as Nordic co-ordinator in all dealings with the Asian Development Bank until 2007. Nordic co-operation will also continue in NORSAD, which provides financial support in the form of loans, for enterprises in the SADC countries.

The work of the Nordic Development Fund (NDF) has in the past been highly effective and consistently successful. Since Denmark decided not to participate in the fifth increase in contributions, the Ministers for Development Aid decided in 2005 that the Nordic Region would not increase the fund's capital. Since then the NDF has not been able to engage in new projects and is concentrating on closing down the fund, which is expected to take 4–5 years. However, the NDF will meet its current obligations, and the high quality of its work will be maintained through close co-operation in accordance with the development policy's principles. Finland will provide the chair of its board for one year from the summer of 2006.

In development-aid research, co-operation will continue in the form of active participation in the work of the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI). In September 2005 the institute arranged Nordic Africa Days in Uppsala. These were primarily aimed at researchers, but officials were invited to attend as observers. Similar days designed specifically for officials are planned, preliminarily for 2007.

Along with the other Nordic countries, Finland supports the Nordic Africa Institute and its research, seminars and conferences, publications and scholarship fund (€400,000 p.a). In addition, the institute's recruitment of a Finnish researcher has clearly stimulated interest among the Finnish research community. In line with the recommendations of an evaluation completed by the Nordic Africa Institute at the beginning of 2006, active efforts are being made to promote the institute's significance within national organisations.

In terms of financing development aid, all the Nordic countries have committed themselves to meeting the UN recommendation of 0.7 percent of Gross National Product (GNP). Norway, Sweden and Denmark achieved this level long ago, and Finland has committed itself to raise its level of finance, both in the government aid programme and at EU level. Finland aims to reach 0.7 percent of GNP in 2010. Iceland's objective is to come up to a level of 0.35 percent in 2008.

Ministers for Trade

The objective of the Nordic Ministers for Trade is to strengthen the position of the Nordic Region in terms of global competition and European integration. The Trade Ministers will also follow up on the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers in promoting freedom of movement, integrating Nordic industry and building up the single Nordic market.

During the Finnish Presidency, the trade ministers focus on innovation and research, and will highlight the need to make use of organisations such as NordForsk in funding research and the NICE innovation centre.

The Nordic Trade Ministers meet periodically to prepare for WTO meetings. Future meetings will be affected by the progress and timescale of the current round of talks. At the senior official level, trade-policy advisory work will continue as it has proven capable of generating Nordic synergy.

Defence and foreign affairs

Nordic co-operation on defence and foreign affairs is the domain of the prime ministers and foreign ministers, with some work done by top officials. Various meetings and gatherings are held each year, with the most frequent co-operation occurring with representatives of the Baltic States, in what are known as the NB8 and NB6 constellations. The former comprises all the Nordic and Baltic countries, the latter consists of the Nordic and Baltic EU member states.

In recent years the Nordic prime ministers and foreign ministers have dealt with such core defence and foreign-affairs issues as transatlantic relations, EU enlargement (specifically the Turkish application process), EU-Russian relations, the Northern Dimension, UN issues, the Middle

East, the follow-up to natural disasters in Asia, and security and other issues pertaining to any future pandemic. Issues relating to the proposal for an EU constitutional treaty have also been discussed.

One crucial theme has been improvements to overseas Nordic crisis management, designed to help Nordic citizens in need. The aim is to implement joint crisis-management initiatives, improve the exchange of information and develop joint exercises and warning systems.

The Nordic countries continue to work closely together at the UN. Nordic bureau chiefs meet once a week in New York, and other experts meet in unofficial contexts, including various committee meetings. The Nordic representatives aim to follow a rotation principle and co-ordinate candidacies within the Western Group.

The aim is to ensure that Nordic initiatives form part of the submissions and negotiating positions put forward by the Western Group and the EU. Over the last two years co-operation has focused in particular on contributing to reform of the UN, in part through appeals to third countries.

Reform of the UN and a more rapid reform process also play central roles in co-operation between national capitals. The Nordic UN bureau chiefs hold official meetings twice a year.

Finland will also focus on global control issues, and seek to promote a social dimension in globalisation, both in the UN and in its labour organisation, the ILO.

With regard to the UN disarmament conference in Geneva, successful Nordic co-operation on weapons control continues, with an emphasis on work in civic organisations and particular focus on the issue of small arms. Close Nordic co-operation on human rights continues at the UN, both in its new Human Rights Council and in other contexts.

Nordic co-operation on Saami affairs

Issues which affect the indigenous peoples have a high priority in Finnish human-rights policies. The Saami are an indigenous people with their own distinct language, culture, lifestyle and identity, who live in northern Norway, Sweden and Finland, and in the interior of the Kola Peninsula.

In October 2005 an expert group including representatives of the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian governments and the Saami Parliaments presented a proposal for a Nordic–Saami convention. This would allow Finland, Sweden and Norway to reach agreement on the status of the Saami, and on a range of pertinent social and cultural issues. The group hopes that the Saami convention will win approval from the Russian Saami. Dealing with the convention proposal in conjunction with the Saami Parliament would expand the role of the Nordic Region in indigenous affairs.

Military co-operation

During the Presidency the central themes of military co-operation will be military-crisis management (NORDCAPS – Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support), Nordic support for UN peace keeping, the development of Nordic co-operation on defence materials (NORDAC – Nordic Armaments Co-operation), collaboration between Nordic and Baltic defence forces in NB8, and the Nordic Initiative to support the restructuring of defence systems in the West Balkans. A new element in NB8 co-operation is joint support for the expansion of Ukraine's defence forces.

Nordic Ministers for Defence meet twice a year. The second of these is an NB8 meeting, i.e. it is also attended by the Baltic ministers.

The permanent secretaries of the defence ministries also meet twice a year to establish a coherent and co-ordinated approach to defence. These meetings deal with training events, equality issues, reorganisation and partnership issues. The meetings are also used to exchange information on operational issues.

Twice a year, representatives of the defence-policy sections of the ministries come together for a joint meeting (Nordic Steering), which has primary responsibility for joint Nordic contingency planning in the event of crises.

NORDCAPS co-operation will be made more effective in order to cope with the changes taking place in its field. In line with those changes, the Forces Register will be removed from this arrangement. As part of the review, particular attention will be paid to prevailing trends in rapid-reaction forces within the EU. NORDCAPS will concern itself primarily with issues related to training for peacekeeping operations.