

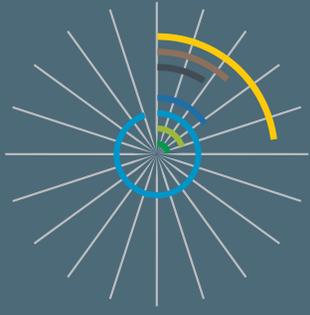
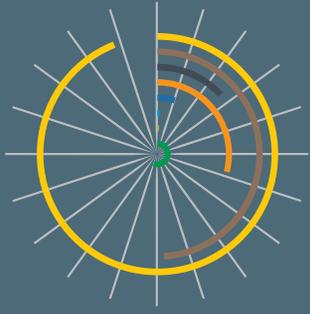
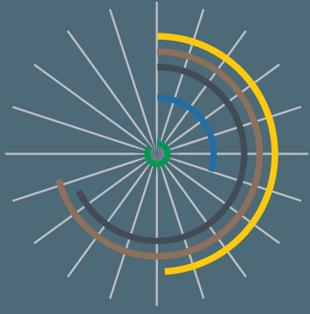
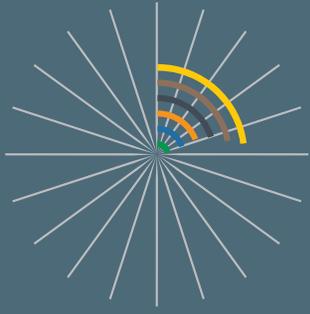
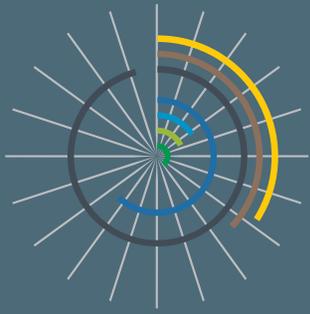


norden

# Nordic Communities

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Johan Strang



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**A VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

Johan Strang

CENTRE FOR NORDIC STUDIES,  
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

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# Foreword

Although commissioned to mark the 60th anniversary of the Nordic Council in 2012, this is no run-of-the-mill commemorative publication. Rather than taking a retrospective approach, it looks to the future of Nordic co-operation, following up on the debate rekindled by the Swedish historian Gunnar Wetterberg's book *United Nordic Federation* (2010) and the Stoltenberg report (2009) on working more closely together on foreign and security policy. In spring 2011, the Nordic Council commissioned the Centre for Nordic Studies (CENS) at the University of Helsinki to conduct a study and to present proposals for strengthening Nordic co-operation.

CENS was delighted to accept the commission. In writing the book, I was ably assisted by a reference group that met regularly in Helsinki to discuss the main points. The group consisted of Lars Erik Häggman, Professor Pauli Kettunen, Professor Pia Letto-Vanamo, Professor Bo Stråth and Research Director Henrik Stenius, and their fascinating discussions greatly facilitated my work. We were also in regular contact with senior adviser Sverre Jervell at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Professor Klaus Petersen at the Centre for Welfare State Research at the University of Southern Denmark, as well as Jan-Erik Enestam, the Secretary General of the Nordic Council.

A list of all of those who took part in the panels and working groups, attended workshops and were interviewed can be found at the back of the book. The work of the NordForsk-funded network

that researches the history of Nordic co-operation, co-ordinated by Henrik Stenius and Mirja Österberg at CENS, was a source of particularly useful synergies.

The working groups discussed specific areas of policy: Professor Norbert Götz of Södertörn University headed up the group on inter-governmental co-operation; Dr Mary Hilson of University College London led the group discussing co-operation in the voluntary sector; Senior Researcher Pertti Joenniemi of the University of Eastern Finland led the group on foreign- and security policy; Professor Pauli Kettunen of the University of Helsinki and Klaus Petersen of the University of Southern Denmark led the group dealing with welfare policy; and Senior Researcher Eli Moen of BI Norwegian Business School led the one on economic policy.

Minutes of the group meetings and project seminars are available at:

<http://www.helsinki.fi/cens/swe/forskning/projekt/scenarier.html>.

# Summary

At present, there is a widespread desire, among both politicians and the general public, for the Nordic countries to work more closely together. The crisis within the EU, the strength of the Nordic welfare model and general international interest in the Arctic are just three of the factors behind this. Official co-operation is already rooted in strong traditions, but the current situation is different, and in many ways more favourable, than when the Nordic Council was formed in 1952, the Helsinki Treaty signed in 1962 and the Nordic Council of Ministers set up in 1971.

At Nordic level, co-operation increasingly consists of working together on the Region's relationships with the rest of the world. The outside world sees Nordic co-operation as something positive. Even the countries' different relationships to NATO and the EU no longer represent a material obstacle to working together. At European and global level, the increasing importance of regions has coincided with growing demand for greater democracy in international work. One of the great challenges of our time is to develop international partnerships based on democratic foundations. The Nordic countries have an important contribution to make by taking the lead in such initiatives and engaging in international debate.

The peoples of the five Nordic nations share culture, values and a sense of affinity. This unique sense of community should not be taken for granted. Maintaining it requires wide-ranging cultural co-operation, while a visible, aspirational and pragmatic partnership

at the highest political level would serve to reinforce the popular sense of community.

Under the current circumstances, the Nordic countries are not in need of a one-size-fits-all solution that resembles a federal state. Rather, it is important to develop new ways of working together at international level, which combine flexible solutions for specific policy areas with the lofty ambitions and democratic transparency of a federal state. We could be on the verge of a Nordic *golden age*, but this will require a greater focus on tangible and visible results. Our co-operation has long been based on the principle of consensus, but now we need new structures that the individual countries can opt into or out of. As such, we recommend that the principle of consensus be replaced with a flexible, modular approach.

With this in mind, the key proposals for closer Nordic co-operation identified in this book are as follows:

## **1 Prioritise specific policy areas by designating them as Nordic Communities**

Each Nordic Community would have its own council of ministers with a rotating presidency. As per the NORDEFECO model, this council would appoint working parties to address particular issues. The prerequisites for a Nordic Community are that the governments work together in a flexible manner in pursuit of defined objectives, and that the Community provides a boost to political and social debate. In structural terms, the Communities would need to be reflected in the committees of the Nordic Council, via special networks, think tanks, and forums empowered to draft proposals and launch initiatives. As things stand at present, the obvious themes for communities would be in foreign, defence, environmental

and research policy. Communities for the welfare and energy sectors would also be worth considering.

## **2 Make foreign- and defence policy part of official Nordic co-operation**

NORDEFECO could, on its own terms, be incorporated into the Council of Ministers. A similar body could also be established for foreign policy. The Nordic Council should set up a committee on foreign and defence policy immediately.

## **3 The Nordic Council and Council of Ministers should be realistic in their relationships with the EU**

The idea of a Nordic bloc within the EU, and of the Nordic Council and Council of Ministers forming part of an EU hierarchical system, should be abandoned in favour of proactive policies and debates about the EU issues on which the Nordic countries should work together. The Nordic Council should take steps to ensure that the countries implement EU directives and regulations in a uniform manner.

## **4 Use foreign- and defence policy as a model for rationalisation in other sectors**

Working parties of civil servants and other professionals should be established to study ways in which the countries can work together on staff training and the procurement of

equipment and materials in, for example, the health sector and research.

## **5 Counter the democratic deficit in international co-operation**

Despite the increasing importance of multilateral partnerships, it remains difficult to envisage forms of democracy that are not based on national boundaries. The Nordic countries should set an example by making vigorous efforts to involve parliaments, NGOs and specialists in drawing up proposals, and by creating forums for broader debate on international partnerships.

## **6 Hold annual debates on Nordic issues in the national parliaments**

The debates on freedom of movement that were held in the Nordic parliaments in spring 2012 represented a major step forward and could become a tradition. Next year, it would be appropriate to discuss defence policy, followed by topics such as the environment, energy and research collaboration.

## **7 Separate the formal and substantive work of the Council of Ministers' Secretariat**

At present, the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat suffers from a lack of clarity about its purpose. It operates as both

an administrative secretariat and as a driving force for new ideas, which has both the right and the duty to propose new initiatives. The former tasks could be left to a purely administrative secretariat that organises meetings, the latter to a more independent body resembling a think tank or policy unit.

## **8 Make the Nordic Council more political and more Nordic by making party groups the main driving force**

At present, the Council suffers from a lack of clarity regarding whether the national or the ideological-political perspective should dominate debate. Party groups should be prioritised over the national delegations.

## **9 Use and reinforce the Nordic brand by defining objectives, standards and indices in various areas of policy**

A “Nordic welfare index” and “Nordic climate targets” could be of major political importance at both regional and global level. Particularly relevant would be an international freedom of movement index, the purpose of which would be to quantify progress in the Region, or parts of it, e.g. the Øresund Region or Tornedal, compared to similar regions elsewhere in Europe and the world.

## **10 Enhance opportunities for informal contact between civil servants**

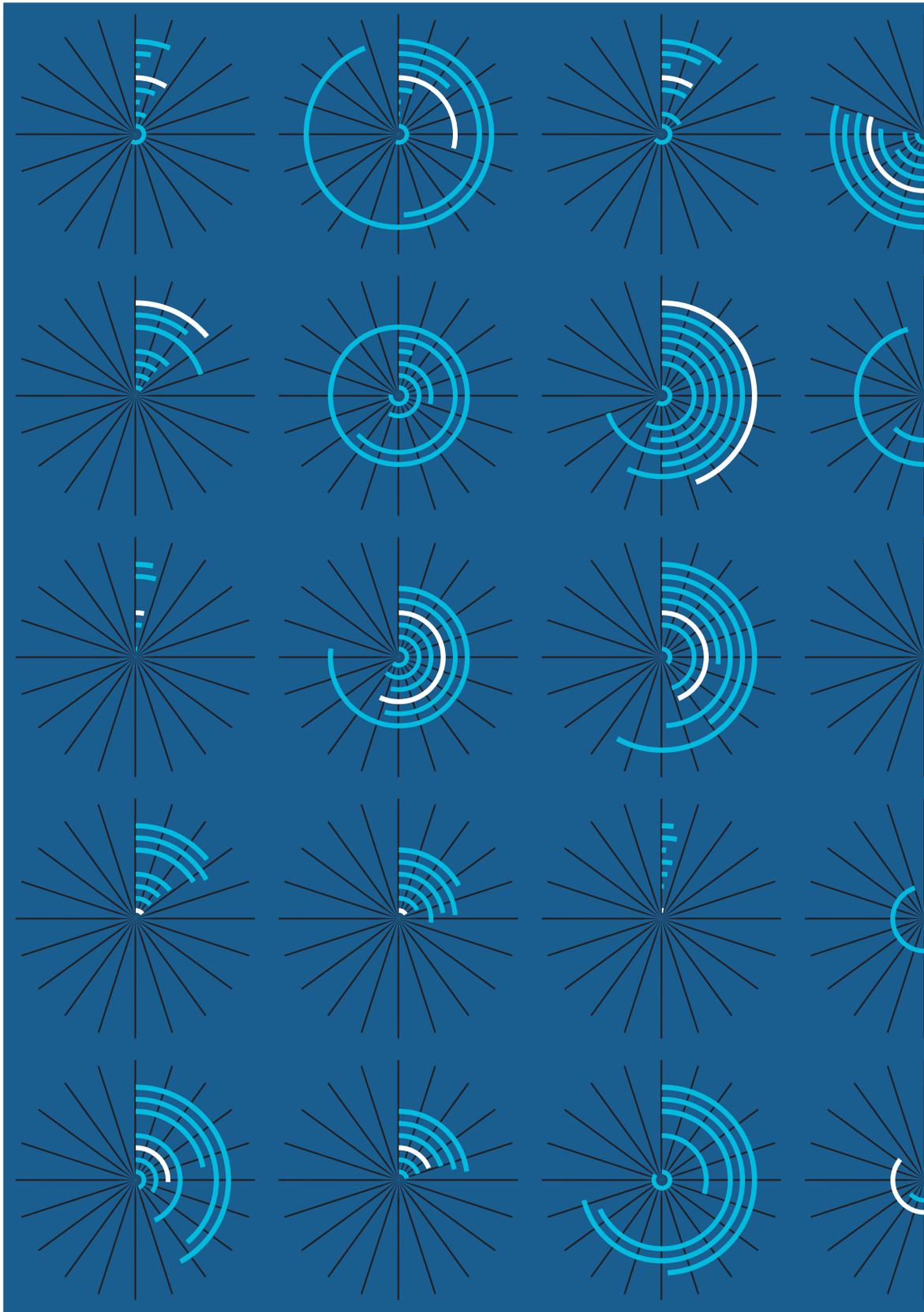
Nordic co-operation's trump card has long been the strong informal contacts between civil servants in the various countries. For various reasons, this advantage is now under threat. As a form of succession planning, Nordic mentor programmes should be established within the national ministries to pass personal contacts on to the next generation. Mobility/trainee-exchange programmes would be another option.

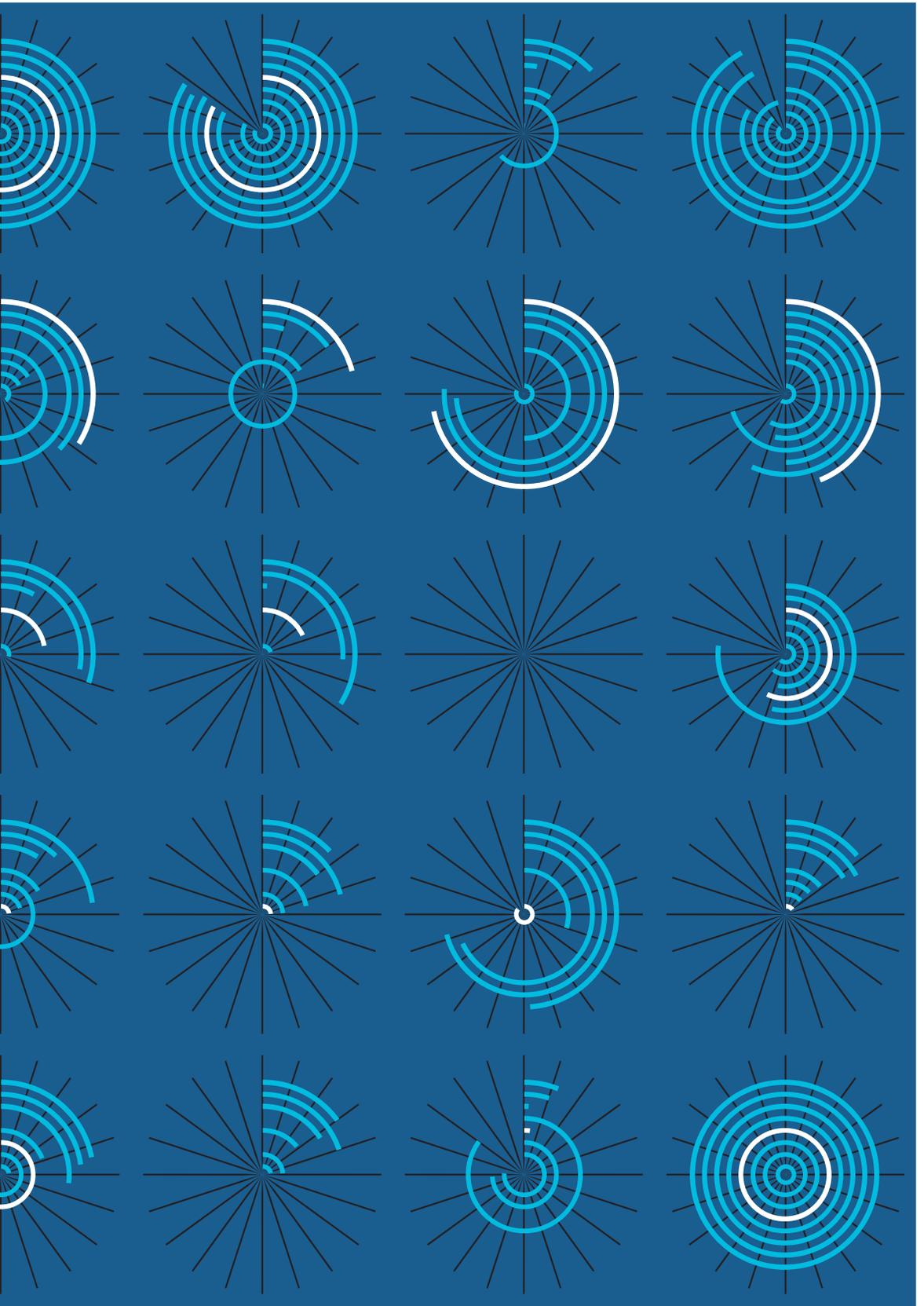
## **11 Invest in knowledge about the Nordic Region**

At the moment, there is considerable external interest in Nordic experiences of conflict resolution, welfare, gender equality and international co-operation, but actual knowledge is in short supply. This is a task for independent critical research and for a more policy-oriented Nordic think tank. It is also important to invest in knowledge about the Region and about Nordic co-operation in schools by improving the teaching of the history, politics, language, and geography of the neighbouring countries, and by running exchange programmes for both teachers and students.

## **12 Make cultural co-operation autonomous**

The whole of the Nordic culture budget should be transferred to the Nordic Cultural Fund, and the Nordic institutions should be accorded greater respect. In recent years, official Nordic co-operation has preferred to prioritise projects, but if this is done at the expense of functioning institutions, then it leads to a weakening of co-operation's critical mass.





# **1**

# **The Nordic community and Nordic Communities**

Nordic co-operation is very much back on the political agenda. The prime ministers have prioritised the Nordic perspective by meeting more frequently and by discussing tangible initiatives such as air surveillance over Iceland and research collaboration in the health sector. The foreign ministers are highly active, and their solidarity declaration of April 2011 was an important manifestation of rapidly growing co-operation on peacekeeping, security policy and foreign affairs. In addition, since 2009, the defence ministers have formalised co-operation on procurement, exercises and other activities under the new NORDEFECO (Nordic Defence Co-operation).

Much of this new co-operation followed in the wake of the report *Nordic Co-operation on Foreign and Security Policy* (2009) by former Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg. At a political level, the Stoltenberg report was highly successful. After only three years, most of its 13 proposals are already on their way to implementation – from air surveillance over Iceland and the cyber-defence network, to joint embassies and the solidarity declaration. The Swedish historian Gunnar Wetterberg's *United Nordic Federation* (2010) has had just as great an impact in relation to the renewed debate on the Nordic Region. This book may not have resulted in many concrete policy measures, but Wetterberg's creative proposals captured the imagination of the media, commentators and intellectuals. A quasi-federal system is now the official goal of the Norden Association in Denmark and in Norway.

Nordic co-operation has had its ups and downs. The Kalmar Union in the 15th century and Scandinavianism in the 19th represent peaks; the dissolution of the Union between Norway and Sweden in 1905 and the Euphoria of the 1990s, troughs. From a post-war perspective, it is usually claimed that Nordic co-operation has enjoyed two golden ages (see *Norden i sicksack (The Nordic Countries Zigzag)*, 2000): the first in the 1950s, with the introduction of the Nordic Council, the Passport Union and joint labour market, and the signing of the social convention. The second was in the 1970s, when the Council of Ministers and a wide range of Nordic institutions were established.

All of the conditions for a third Nordic golden age are now in place. There are many reasons for this. Major global geopolitical shifts are creating conditions in which it is both easy and desirable to work with your nearest neighbours. The world is becoming less Euro-centric. The USA is turning its attention inwards or towards other parts of the world, and Asia – particularly China – is emerging as an increasingly important economic and political centre.

In addition, the Nordic Region itself is becoming less peripheral. The Arctic is in the global spotlight thanks to the lure of natural resources and new shipping routes opened up by climate change. The Nordic Region increasingly serves as a link between Europe and Asia, be it for shipping, air or rail traffic. It has become a key part of European energy policy, especially since Germany decided to do away with nuclear power. Economics increasingly dominates political debate, and the Nordic model is attracting considerable international interest as a way of creating the conditions for a flexible and competitive economy combined with adequate welfare provision. The Nordic countries consistently top the international rankings for education and training, gender equality, innovation and competitiveness.

The world now sees Nordic co-operation differently. Throughout history, neighbouring states and other major powers have sought

to split the Region. Now, nobody has anything to gain from stymying the Nordic Region. Even NATO and the EU no longer constitute obstacles – in fact, quite the opposite. Within both organisations, the role of regions and regional co-operation is increasing, while the distinctions between members and non-members are declining in importance. There is a growing need for complementary forms of multilateral partnerships and organisations that transcend the limits of the EU and NATO. Both the Baltic and the Arctic regions face challenges that need to be solved through working together at regional level.

This report is founded on the belief that the Nordic Region and Nordic co-operation are capable of taking the initiative in debates about the future of Europe by setting the agenda for this new regionalisation process. The Nordic countries have a long tradition of working together and have well-established political practices and institutions upon which to build. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Nordic Council and the 50th of the Helsinki Treaty. Since the 19th century, Nordic partnerships have flourished in virtually every sector and at all levels of society. Today, however, the Region faces very different challenges than it did a hundred, 60 or even just a few years ago. Nordic co-operation takes place within a large and complex network of international organisations, each of which has a different emphasis and requirements for flexibility and tangible, visible results. For a long time, Nordic co-operation has been built on the principle of consensus. Today, it is important to create flexible forms of co-operation that can involve two or three countries taking a lead. Co-operation should move from a consensus approach to a modular one.

Democracy is another challenge. The crisis currently afflicting the EU is not just economic in nature – it is also a political crisis of the highest possible order, rooted in increasing polarisation between north and south and growing nationalism. The counter-movement sweeping across Europe stems from a sense of

powerlessness, deriving from the fact that European integration has mainly concentrated on markets and money, while neglecting democracy, solidarity and the citizens' perspective. Throughout the 20th century, democracy and welfare were intimately linked to the nation state – in many cases, the welfare state was considered a key part of the actual process of nation building. Today, it is increasingly apparent that, in many respects, the nation state is too small and borders are being prised open. On the other hand, we have not yet managed to find a means by which democracy and welfare can transcend national borders.

This is an area in which the Nordic countries can make an important and potentially definitive contribution. The Nordic Region is special. As international partnerships go, Nordic co-operation enjoys uniquely strong popular support and has never been perceived as undemocratic. There is a long history of extensive parliamentary co-operation, a habit of including popular movements and organisations in the political process, and a tradition of starting from the citizen's perspective – including in relation to major inter-governmental agreements, such as the Passport Union and the social and labour conventions.

All of the conditions are in place for a new Nordic golden age. There is no time to waste on nostalgia or self-glorification. We need foresight and the courage to take the next big step.

## **1. The Nordic Region in the world and in Europe**

When they were established in the 1950s and '70s, the official structures for Nordic co-operation were designed to provide a foundation for working together effectively within the Region. Today, however, the main focus is on the Region's relationships with the rest of the world. Political leaders have rediscovered the Nordic perspective,

and have come to realise that a united Region has a strong and important voice. They increasingly work together and hold joint meetings with leading politicians from, for example, the United Kingdom (UK–Nordic–Baltic Summit 2011), Germany (the proposed joint meeting of foreign ministers in 2012) and Russia.

Most of this new outreach work is done outside of the official co-operation structures. The Nordic Council and Council of Ministers have both tried to adapt to this more outward-looking approach by prioritising their neighbourhood strategy, the globalisation initiative and the Top-level Research Initiative. Consequently, it is becoming more and more obvious that the official structures were not built to serve as tools for a common foreign policy. There is no council of ministers or committee for foreign and defence policy, and Nordic co-operation has never pinned down a definitive position of its own on the European Union.

We believe that it is essential that the Nordic Council and Council of Ministers adopt a more global and European perspective. With the big nations coalescing into their own groups to address the major issues of the day, and with Europe increasingly led by Germany and France, it is important that the Nordic Region presents a common front to the world. It is not enough for ministers to meet and governments to work more closely together. The Nordic countries need a broader basis from which to discuss strategies in relation to their neighbours – Russia, the Baltic republics, the Arctic and Germany – as well as questions such as how to exert greater influence in the EU and the G20, or how to take better advantage of the Region's position as a bridge between Europe and Asia.

One of the main drivers behind the renaissance in Nordic co-operation is undoubtedly the insecurity that currently prevails in the EU. Every discussion of Nordic co-operation must be seen in a European context, and crises and upheaval often act as catalysts for progress. It would be good if the current EU crises also led to progress in Nordic co-operation, but we do not think it is a good idea

to promote policies that seek to highlight the Region as an alternative to the EU. Historically, adopting a position like this has never worked out to the benefit of the Nordic countries – and under the current circumstances, it is particularly important not to exacerbate polarisation between Northern and Southern Europe.

Once, people thought that the EU would render Nordic co-operation superfluous – but that time has passed. Indeed, the 1990s rhetoric about a Europe of the regions is now gaining substance, and there is every reason to believe that Nordic co-operation will increase in importance, regardless of what the future holds for the EU. In the event of a looser union, and the Euro being abandoned completely, the Nordic countries may seize the opportunity to discuss radical initiatives such as a joint currency or financial union, both to compensate for what has been lost and to serve as a positive example for Europe, proving that international co-operation still has something to offer. In the event of the crisis leading to a stronger Europe – whether dominated by the big states and led by Germany or revolving more around the smaller states and loosely federalist – Nordic co-operation is likely to play a bigger role. Quite simply, a union of 27 member states requires different approaches than one with only nine, 12 or 15. A range of smaller groups that work together on specific areas of policy, in clusters that often transcend the Union’s formal borders, is already emerging within the EU.

Contemporary international politics is characterised by what social scientists have referred to as “intersecting multilateralism”. The concept suggests that, via intersecting relationships, agreements and official bodies (the UN, the EU, the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, etc.), the countries of Europe (and of the world) form an interwoven network that does not have a formal, systematic and coherent structure. From a Nordic perspective, the lesson must be to abandon the idea of trying to wedge Nordic co-operation into a hierarchical structure somewhere between the national level and the European level.

It is important that Nordic co-operation has an international profile and a proactive European agenda. However, it is not a critical factor that the countries have different relationships with the EU, NATO and many other international organisations. Nordic co-operation is justified in its own right, it has its own strong traditions and it must continue to function as precisely what it is – the Nordic Region.

However, the increasingly complex fabric of international co-operation also means that Nordic co-operation must now legitimise itself differently. In the days when the Nordic Council and the UN were the only international bodies with which our politicians engaged, it was taken for granted that leading politicians would spend time and resources on working together as a Region. Today, with a range of international bodies competing for attention, heavy demands are placed on Nordic co-operation to produce tangible content, results and added value.

We are therefore convinced that co-operation needs a significant boost via ambitious and result-oriented collaboration at the highest political level. Only through high-profile measures, with a solid democratic foundation, will the Region be able to play an active and visible role in the debate about Europe's future.

## II. The Stoltenberg and Wetterberg models

The political imperative for ideas that will enhance co-operation is crystal clear, but no other writers have attracted quite the same level of attention as Stoltenberg and Wetterberg.

The Finnish Institute of International Affairs' publication *Norden – making a difference* (Tiilikainen & Korhonen 2011) was based on in-depth research and included a range of proposals and recommendations. Yet its relatively low level of ambition came as something of a disappointment both to the general public and to those who commissioned the work. The same might be said of the

Danish–Latvian initiative *NB8 – Wise Men Report* (Birkavs & Gade 2010). Its core message was the desirability of working even more closely with the Baltic republics, but even on this point it did not go as far as the Stoltenberg report. In 2011, as part of a Norwegian study of Europe, Thorsten Borring Olesen wrote the detailed report *Den europæiske udfordring – EU, EØS og nordisk samarbejde i historisk belysning (The European Challenge – the EU, EEA and Nordic Co-operation in a historic light)*. Olesen stressed that the countries have always worked together within a European context, but he did not quite manage to transform the historical lessons into a clear vision for the future.

The Stoltenberg and Wetterberg reports stand out for a number of reasons. Both authors are colourful personalities, each of whom possesses an exceptional ability to convey messages in a compelling and entertaining manner. The optimistic tone helps too, as does their endeavour to promote visible and aspirational partnerships at the highest political level.

Of course, both reports have their limitations. For Wetterberg, the concept of the federal state was a double-edged sword. It attracted attention and debate, but manoeuvred the author into a corner from which it was well-nigh impossible to escape. The book contained many good practical proposals – a Nordic filter for work on legislation, a labour-market commission, a joint research council, etc. – but these were overshadowed by the central thesis of a federal state. Wetterberg left too little scope for a more selective implementation of his ideas, and this allowed opponents to dismiss him as a wishful thinker.

Stoltenberg's report, on the other hand, was based on existing forms of co-operation in foreign and security policy, and proposed tangible measures for working together more closely and in greater depth. What it lacked, however, was a holistic perspective and a unifying vision. The report contained no discussion of the consequences, for the Region or for Nordic co-operation, of working more

closely together in other policy areas. Tellingly, the Nordic Council and Council of Ministers were not even mentioned.

It might be said that Stoltenberg and Wetterberg mirror the traditional fault line in debates about Nordic co-operation. One line advocates large-scale, all-embracing solutions, be it an economic, customs or defence union, or a kind of mini-EU, United Nordic States or a Scandinavian-inspired nation state. Proponents of this line favour a joint constitution and a political leadership wielding far-reaching supranational powers. Wetterberg takes this route, calling for a more universal and powerful federal state.

If we take the federal state as an objective, it is no great leap to follow Wetterberg's line of thinking and consider the history of co-operation as one long series of failures, as an ambition that has never quite been realised. On the other hand, the second main line of debate, the one advocated by Stoltenberg, asserts that a quasi-federal system has rarely been the objective, and that there are good reasons to see co-operation as a success story, in which a long series of pragmatic solutions to practical problems in various policy areas has led to an unprecedented level of integration. Noble visions of a federation may have run aground, but partnerships have persevered, progressing more cautiously, step by step, without ambitious supranational or multilateral treaties.

### III. Nordic Communities

There is therefore a tension between Stoltenberg and Wetterberg. They offer two different visions of the future: the former a gradualist, advocating voluntary partnership, the latter calling for a binding, universal solution. The question is: which kind of Nordic co-operation do we need today?

Historically, federal states and federations have tended to arise from a desire to ward off an external threat or guarantee domestic

peace after invasion, conquest or civil war. By no stretch of the imagination are these the sorts of challenges currently facing the Nordic countries. Even the EU crisis does not appear to provide sufficient grounds for serious discussion of a federal state. Perhaps there is a reluctance to put difficult issues on the table if they are potentially more divisive than unifying – and this is not just a reference to the EU or NATO, but also to other difficult issues, such as fisheries, agriculture and nuclear power.

The current outlook for Nordic co-operation is undeniably inauspicious in a range of policy areas, either because the countries have very different interests, because they compete with each other or because the European dimension dominates the area concerned. However, it must be said that, in many other areas, the Wetterberg dream does seem more realistic. Study after study has stressed the myriad positive reasons for working very closely together in areas such as foreign and defence policy, welfare issues, consumer affairs, gender equality, law, research, innovation, education and training.

To make a real step change, it is important to acknowledge that the prospects for partnership vary between policy areas. However, the fact that difficulties exist should not be allowed to delay efforts or lower aspirations in areas where progress is possible. What the Nordic countries need now is not some kind of one-size-fits-all panacea, but new ways of working together, ways that combine the flexibility and pragmatism of Stoltenberg's gradualism with Wetterberg's aspirations and constitutional and democratic transparency.

Our vision for a new golden age for Nordic co-operation is based on what we call "Nordic Communities" for particular policy areas, starting in the ones that have the greatest potential. Communities could derive legitimacy from a political treaty, a convention or an agreement in which Nordic political leaders declare their countries' intention to work more closely together on a particular issue.

Communities would provide a framework for aspirational yet flexible partnerships with well-defined political content on specific

issues. A ministerial council, preferably with a rotating chair, would provide the necessary strong political leadership and would be empowered to appoint working parties to address real problems and challenges. It would also be essential for co-operation at ministerial level to be accompanied by tangible moves to encourage debate throughout the Region, involving parliamentarians, experts and the general public. The way in which Communities are organised could vary between policy areas. As well as a Nordic Foreign Affairs Community, Nordic Welfare Community or Nordic Energy Community, we might see more focused ones such as a Nordic Consumer Community, Nordic Research Community or Nordic Public Service Community.

#### **iv. The democratic challenge**

Neither Wetterberg nor Stoltenberg placed particular emphasis on issues of democracy, but it is quite obvious that these would be easier to address in a federal state than in a more voluntary and flexible sectoral collaboration. A federal state would require a constitution to define its democratic structure – e.g. a bicameral system as per the American or German model. This in turn would be under constant scrutiny by experts, the fourth estate and the general public, all of whom might retain their current national perspective for some considerable time, but would gradually adopt an increasingly Nordic worldview.

In a more voluntary and sectoral collaboration, à la Stoltenberg, the democratic issues would be somewhat different. As long as co-operation remains sporadic and occasional, it might remain the remit of the national governments, which derive their legitimacy from their own parliaments. However, the more wide-ranging collaboration becomes, and the greater the consequences for nations and their citizens, the more important it will be to find new ways

to endow it with greater democratic legitimacy. If ambitious Nordic Communities are to be established in selected policy areas, it is of the utmost importance that they are transparent and enjoy solid democratic support from both parliamentarians and the general public.

How to achieve this is another matter. The challenges facing global democracy and the current democratic deficit in international work are enough to keep whole legions of European political scientists busy. However, the Nordic countries have an opportunity to experiment with real, practical solutions. Clear, transparent, formal structures that work well are, of course, the desired outcome. Once these are in place, the biggest challenges an international organisation faces are to generate the critical mass needed, to monitor and provide feedback on how well it is working, and to generate new ideas and initiatives. Media and academic debate in the Region still focuses very much on the national level, so work needs to be done to encourage more Nordic debate. Open debate is not a threat – quite the contrary, it is the only way to confer legitimacy on political bodies.

As the forum in which parliamentarians and governments meet, the Nordic Council plays a key role in bestowing democratic legitimacy on co-operation. Each Nordic Community should therefore be complemented by a Council committee. However, democracy is not just about representation, it is also about participation. It is therefore important to find a role for popular movements, NGOs and other institutions. Specialists and experts need to be involved too, e.g. via think tanks, research projects or networks that discuss co-operation from a critical and independent perspective. This will be particularly important in policy areas where Nordic Communities have been set up. A key challenge will be to generate dialogue between the political- (governments and parliaments) and the non-political levels (popular movements and experts). One way of achieving this would be through high-profile political forums (Nordic Defence Forum, Nordic Social Forum, etc.), where politicians, NGOs, experts and the media could meet to discuss topical issues.

## v. The Nordic community

Those who work at Nordic level, and think from a Nordic perspective, rarely reflect on the fundamental *raison d'être* that underpins co-operation. We often hear that it is important for the preservation of cultural affinity and our unique social model. Important though they may be, these arguments only really appeal to those who are already convinced of the merits of Nordic co-operation. For many others, they may sound sentimental, backward-looking and even off-putting.

The sharing of experiences is often cited as the core of Nordic co-operation. The Nordic countries are each other's "significant others" – for generations, they have compared, competed, copied and learned from each other in every sector and at every level of society. This is how good Nordic practices have evolved. While this is undeniably an essential part of co-operation, and one that must constantly be developed, it is by no means all that co-operation has achieved. The Passport Union, the joint labour market and the social conventions were all ground-breaking at the time, and it would be a sad day indeed if contemporary co-operation were to shy away from working towards important agreements at the highest political level.

Both Stoltenberg and Wetterberg focused on economic and rational arguments. Wetterberg's answer to the question "Why the Nordic Region?" was a classic argument about economies of scale, according to which a federal state would create a genuine internal market that would boost our economy and make the Region big enough to be seen and heard in international arenas. Together, the Nordic countries would not only be one of the largest and most powerful voices in the EU, but would also claim a seat at the G20, where more and more of the most important decisions are now taken. Stoltenberg was more cautious when it came to the fundamental reasons for co-operation, but he gives the impression that his

primary concern stems from the resource perspective. The foreign ministries and, to an even greater extent, the defence ministries, struggle with ever-increasing costs – only by working together are the Nordic countries able to maintain satisfactory foreign ministries and modern, technologically sophisticated armed forces.

Economic and rational arguments are important, often crucial, but there is good reason to emphasise the role of the cultural dimension, networks and exchanges of experiences, all of which are prerequisites for a rational form of economic co-operation that works well. It is precisely because the Nordic countries are so tightly interwoven that close co-operation on foreign and defence policy is possible. If we were to undermine the foundations of the type of Nordic networks that exist in all sectors, and at all levels of society, it would soon have implications for our ability to work together at the highest political levels.

Conversely, aspirational and visible partnerships at the highest level can also spill over into other areas. Although the Nordic countries are in many ways more integrated than ever, there is a danger that co-operation is losing its special status in the popular imagination. At present, we believe that distinct, aspirational and visible inter-governmental co-operation would be the best way to strengthen the many Nordic networks and the Nordic community. Far-reaching agreements at government level would attract media and public attention, which would help bring our societies and their peoples even closer together.

The Nordic community and the Nordic Communities would need and strengthen each other. Together, they would provide the Region with a unique opportunity to make a constructive contribution to the debate about the future of international and European co-operation.







# 2

## Key policy areas

Our vision for closer co-operation is based on the principle that circumstances vary between policy areas. At present, Nordic co-operation has no need of a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, we should identify and prioritise areas in which significant progress can be achieved, and initiate stronger, result-oriented inter-governmental co-operation in them, combined with serious efforts to encourage parliamentary and civic debate and widen the scope for presenting issues and launching initiatives (via Nordic Council committees, think tanks and other forums). All of these activities would come together in what we call a Nordic Community.

In this chapter, we will discuss policy areas in which we think that the Nordic countries could work far more closely together. In many cases, we recommend establishing a Nordic Community. However, we also put forward proposals that are not predicated on this new type of Community. We recognise that certain areas have less scope for partnerships, and therefore need a different structure.

It is not our intention to present a comprehensive list of every aspect of Nordic co-operation in every field. Policy areas often overlap, and new ones emerge and disappear again all of the time, so it is important that the debate is ongoing and transcends the different areas. The Nordic Council, NGOs and experts have an important role to play in this. At government level, it is the prime ministers, along with the ministers for Nordic co-operation, who have to have

the vision and courage to re-prioritise or instigate collaboration in important but difficult areas.

## I. Foreign and defence policy

Most of the current headlines about Nordic co-operation concern foreign and defence policy. In many ways, this is a new situation. During the Cold War, foreign and defence policy were taboo within official Nordic bodies, and so any co-operation fell more or less completely outside the official structures of the Nordic Council and Council of Ministers. However, this does not mean that there are no strong traditions of working together in these areas. Defence co-operation carried on covertly throughout the Cold War, for example, and there has been a long tradition of working closely together at international level, preferably under UN auspices, on conflict resolution, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian aid. It might also be said that the point of Nordic security policy was to keep the superpowers, and therefore the conflict between them, at arm's length, and to raise the Region's profile as a place where peace, international solidarity and international law were still held in high esteem. Nordic work on conflict resolution and peacekeeping is still of high international calibre. *The Stoltenberg Report* suggested a joint Nordic reaction force for military intervention and stabilisation, and the foreign ministers are currently working on a new peacekeeping network.

Today, the potential for working together on foreign and defence policy is very different. In many ways, geopolitical change and the economic crisis have forced us to adopt a more co-ordinated Nordic policy in relation to the outside world. This is most obvious in the defence sphere, where the United States has made it known that it is neither willing nor able to shoulder the burden of responsibility for the defence of Europe. This has put pressure on European countries

to work together. In this respect, the Nordic Region is well ahead of the pack, and it is quite common for NATO leaders to highlight Nordic defence co-operation as an example to follow, even though Finland and Sweden are not actually members of the organisation.

Within NORDEF, the Nordic countries have developed close defence collaboration on everything from joint procurement and operations abroad to the education and training of troops and other personnel. Working parties have also been set up to plan for the longer term – the indications are that this will involve a more distinct division of roles between the countries, which will focus on their specialities so that they may complement each other. This would guarantee the maintenance of a sufficiently strong and multi-purpose joint defence capability.

A similar discussion is also being held about the division of responsibilities between foreign services. The Nordic embassies in Berlin have long served as a model and beacon, but behind the shared outer façade and Nordic House, there are still five different embassies, each with its own staff and its own routines. Discussions are now taking place about whether it might be feasible for one embassy to do the work of or represent the others. This could become a reality in countries or regions where it is neither practical nor cost-effective to maintain five separate representations. The embassy concerned could either house staff from the other Nordic countries, or represent the other countries, which would only send their own representatives if they were specifically needed.

In any field, the economic and rational benefits of collaboration are, of course, greatest if responsibilities are shared, but in practice this has proved difficult. Ultimately, nobody wants to give up any of their powers and become reliant on another state. Real mutual trust is needed before the roles can be divided up. If Finnish waters are to be patrolled by the Swedish Navy, if the Swedish air-sea rescue service is to rely on assistance from Norwegian helicopters, if Norwegian fighter pilots are to be trained in Denmark, or if Denmark's offi-

cial representation in Peru is provided by Finland, then everybody has to trust that everybody else will live up to their commitments and put their capacity at the disposal of the others when needed.

In its own way, the Stoltenberg solidarity declaration highlighted the increasing mutual dependency that closer foreign and defence policy co-operation entails. However, we believe that the Nordic countries are rapidly approaching the limits of what can be achieved by voluntary and non-binding collaboration. The next step will involve politicising, democratising and publicising the process. The time has therefore come to initiate serious discussion about setting up a Nordic Foreign Policy Community and a Nordic Defence Community.

A necessary first step would be to set up a dedicated ministerial council. We are well aware of the extent of resistance to this concept in the national ministries, where it is felt that there is no need to fix something that is not broken. The fear is that a full ministerial council would only complicate matters and obstruct co-operation, as it would entail extra bureaucracy and impose certain general principles (consensus or Nordic synergy) that are easier to avoid when you are on the outside.

There is good reason to take these concerns seriously. We still propose that the Foreign Policy Community and the Defence Community establish ministerial councils, but we advocate that they adopt a model that better meets the needs of these areas than the current type of ministerial councils, which were established in the 1970s. For defence policy, it would be natural to base this on the NORDEFECO model. The nature of its relationship to official Nordic co-operation could be redefined, but an organisation similar to NORDEFECO could be set up to deal with foreign policy.

Efforts will also be required to enhance the legitimacy of co-operation on foreign and defence policy. There is no doubt that the Nordic Council should adopt a more systematic approach and set up committees for foreign and defence policy, regardless of whether a

Nordic Community is established or not. The national parliaments should also be involved. The debates about freedom of movement in the national parliaments in spring 2012 were a huge success, and we suggest following up on the proposal by the Finnish Speaker, Eero Heinäluoma, for a similar series of events to air views about Nordic defence co-operation.

Last but not least, political debate should also be supplemented by public debate. It is important to engage NGOs and experts through a range of forums, networks and think tanks. The Swedish organisation Folk och Försvar (Society and Defence) could serve as a role model. At present, there is a particularly pressing need for a joint approach to the challenges that the Arctic poses for the Nordic countries. It would also be worth discussing ways of working together to make better use of the Region's position as Europe's frontier and as a bridge between Europe and Asia.

**Key foreign- and defence policy recommendations:**

- Set up a Nordic Foreign Affairs Community
- Set up a Nordic Defence Community
- Set up ministerial councils to oversee these Communities
- Set up a Nordic Council Foreign Affairs Committee and a Defence Committee
- Hold debates in the Nordic parliaments about defence co-operation, as per the model established by the freedom of movement debates in spring 2012
- Develop forums for wider debate on foreign and defence policy co-operation that involve a range of other organisations and experts.

## II. EU policy

The EU has been described as the Nordic Region's biggest failure, as the first international organisation for a century that the Nordic countries have not approached jointly, or in which the Region has not occupied an obvious stratum between the national and the international levels. Back when Finland, Norway and Sweden were negotiating membership, it was normal to think in terms of a Nordic bloc in the EU. The Nordic Council set up a European Union Committee, and it was widely thought that official Nordic co-operation would form part of a hierarchical structure between the European and national level. These hopes were soon dashed. EU leaders made it abundantly clear that there is no place for bloc politics in the European Union, and that each country would have to stand up for its own interests.

In the 1990s, this debate pared the options down to a Nordic bloc or no co-operation at all. It was based on unrealistic expectations and a fundamental misunderstanding of how the EU works and the opportunities for multilateral partnerships that it offers. As long as the Nordic countries are not part of a federal state with a single leadership and representation, they will not be able to bind each other to a common policy. Quite simply, our countries' interests are too different. Why should the East- and West Nordic Regions have the same opinions on fisheries questions? Why should Finland vote the same way as Denmark on agricultural matters? Why should Denmark vote with Finland or Sweden on matters affecting the forestry industry?

However, none of this renders co-operation within the EU meaningless or impossible. We believe that the debate should focus less on the actual decision-making and more on the work before and after votes are held. Nordic co-operation in the EU is not about acting as a bloc and voting the same in every respect, but about being proactive, getting issues of common interest on the agenda

and pushing them together. It is about keeping each other informed so we are able to take account of each other's interests and views, as well as the joint Nordic perspective. There are plenty of circumstances in which the Nordic countries should stand together and defend their traditions and values, such as the Nordic model of collective-bargaining agreements or the long-standing tradition of working together in organisations – in particular, they should work together to fight proposals to levy VAT on non-profit activities.

The three Nordic EU member states already have good experience when it comes to pushing public-, consumer-, gender- and environmental issues. A more systematic Nordic approach would surely generate many more joint and proactive initiatives. Even without claiming to be a regular point of contact between the Nordic countries and Brussels, official Nordic co-operation could play a very important role as a forum for a discussion of the Region's relationships with the European Union. Policy areas in which a Nordic Community is set up should have particularly great potential for developing more co-ordinated EU policy. However, in other areas, the Nordic Council and Council of Ministers could regularly serve as forums for the discussion of issues that are to be presented to the EU.

Politicians could make greater use of the Nordic Council as a forum in which they are able to disagree with, and criticise, each other's national EU policy. Above all else, official co-operation could serve as a channel through which they could work together and encourage creative thinking in relation to the EU through joint studies, think tanks and debating forums.

In a proactive EU co-operation of this sort, it would be important that all of the Nordic countries participated, whether they were "inside" or "outside" the Union.

The question of whether official Nordic co-operation needs an (information) office in Brussels has been debated for a long time. We are absolutely convinced of the merits of the case and there are a variety of potential models. One challenge would be to make sure

that the office did not try to monopolise Nordic activity or co-operation in the EU. It could either function expressly as an information office for the Nordic Council and Council of Ministers, or act as a more independent body, at arm's length from Copenhagen, which builds up its own networks.

**Key EU policy recommendations:**

- Develop a proactive EU policy for prioritised issues
- Use the Nordic Council as a forum for political debate about EU issues
- Commission Nordic studies and set up think tanks to look into the Nordic countries' relationships to the EU.

### **III. Economic and welfare policy**

It has often been claimed that the globalisation and internationalisation of the economy would sound the death knell of the Nordic welfare model. Now, however, there seems to be general agreement that the Nordic model constitutes the best way to respond to, and benefit from, the challenges posed by globalisation.

The Nordic countries have small, open economies, and international competition has always been one of the basic motivations behind both economic and social policy in the Region. The Nordic welfare states may have originally been designed to cope with the needs of traditional industrial economies, but they have also proved successful in the new globalised economy. People often attribute the continued success and social cohesion of the new economy to factors such as infrastructure and clear rules, or to the positive sides of consensus, which facilitate holistic solutions and mean that all levels of government, research, education and business are able to pull in the same direction. Also highlighted are the high level of social trust that enables a relatively high degree of flexibility, and the uni-

versal safety net that allows people to dare to take risks. The Nordic collective-bargaining model is part of this, too. Wages and benefits are regulated by agreements rather than legislation, which makes it relatively easy to react to economic fluctuations or technological innovations. Above all, it is often said that wide-ranging investment in knowledge and skills empowers people and makes them capable of reacting appropriately to ever-changing circumstances.

There are many reasons why the Nordic welfare model attracts international interest, but success brings with it a danger of stagnation. The welfare debate is often characterised by retrospective thinking and nostalgia. Various parties fight among themselves for the right to use the brand “the Nordic model”, but no visionary debate is taking place. At worst, the origins of the model are explained by reference to innate national characteristics, at which point it does not take much for the discussion to descend into pure chauvinism.

Unfortunately, co-operation on welfare also seems to be a lower priority these days. It is paradoxical that the individual countries increasingly portray themselves as advocates of the Nordic welfare model, at the same time as they are paying less and less attention to the collective Nordic aspects of that same model. We think it is important to rejuvenate co-operation on welfare, especially since the model faces such important challenges. Our societies have, for example, found it difficult to cope with atypical family or work patterns, e.g. sole providers, new families, temporary jobs or migrant labour. The welfare state, which in many cases was originally predicated on quite clear, homogenous and static social groups with clearly definable and predictable interests and problems, now needs to be more flexible and individually oriented. On these issues, the Nordic countries have a great deal to learn from each other’s experiences, and should set up joint working parties and think tanks to discuss the Nordic model in an innovative and forward-looking manner.

A related challenge is to design welfare provisions that are applicable across national borders. The traditional welfare state was based on people spending their entire lives in the same country, but a growing number of people now move across borders. This is a major problem throughout the world, and also one of the stumbling blocks faced by the EU. European integration is unlikely to make further progress by focusing exclusively on currencies and markets. The Nordic countries could try to show that ambitious co-operation on welfare is also possible.

The Nordic Passport Union and the social and labour conventions, which were ground-breaking in their day, serve as an excellent basis upon which to build. However, they were written in a very different era. They work well for people who move to another Nordic country in their twenties and settle there for the rest of their lives. Increasingly, however, people move back and forth across borders – in border regions such as Øresund and Tornedal, growing numbers of people commute daily between countries. Technology has also made it possible to have your employer in one country and your office in another. It is in modern everyday life that people encounter the various social obstacles to freedom of movement that the Region has discussed in such depth in recent years.

We believe that the time has come for major updates of the big Nordic conventions. Removing the economic and social barriers to freedom of movement is a matter of credibility – if we do not succeed in resolving these issues, Nordic co-operation will lose its legitimacy and justification. The updates could be based on ministerial-level agreements or treaties that declare that the ultimate objective is to establish a Nordic Welfare Community.

A Nordic Welfare Community should not just aim to solve the problem of cross-border freedom of movement. It should also act as a catalyst for a more wide-ranging discussion of the challenges faced by our national welfare systems in an increasingly international and global everyday reality. The dismantling of welfare in re-

cent years is worthy of a joint Nordic study and evaluation. A Nordic Welfare Community could also make an important contribution to the discussion about international social rights and transnational social citizenship. These rank alongside climate change as the biggest challenges of our time, and the Nordic countries have a unique opportunity to influence developments.

It is important to highlight the role that international comparisons have played and continue to play in national political debates. It used to be common to make Nordic comparisons, but now global or European rankings increasingly set the agenda. Of course, it is important to learn from, and exchange experience with, countries outside the Region, but European welfare and growth statistics often entail a risk of complacency and inaction. We believe that official Nordic co-operation should exploit its positive brand image and launch its own norms, criteria and benchmarks for social welfare, human development and what constitutes the good society. This may sometimes be in direct opposition to the agendas of the World Bank or the World Economic Forum, or the OECD's indices and rankings. A Nordic Welfare Index would not only bring inter-Nordic comparisons back onto the political agenda, but it would help the Region to make a greater impact on international developments.

Along these lines, we envisage official Nordic co-operation leading the way in efforts to quantify the extent to which neighbouring countries are integrated with each other, via some form of Freedom of Movement Index. How easy is it to relocate to and commute between the Nordic countries, compared to, for example, the United States and Canada, Brazil and Peru, or Germany and France? How easy is it for companies to operate in the neighbouring countries? How free from obstacles to cross-border movement is the Nordic Region compared with other regions, and what could we learn from others?

Last but not least, we think that Nordic co-operation on welfare should copy the model for defence policy with regard to research,

staff training and the procurement of materials, e.g. equipment or medicine. As in the defence sector, we might dare to aim for a more distinct division of roles in certain areas. However, this would require more systematic trust in one another, based on people at all political levels being aware of how the co-operation actually works, who is responsible for what, and who to turn to when problems arise. This would require both clear agreement at the highest political level and a broad democratic base – in other words, a Nordic Welfare Community.

**Key economic and welfare recommendations:**

- Set up a Nordic Welfare Community
- Vigorously pursue radical solutions to the problem of obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement, e.g. via a much publicised practical report à la Stoltenberg
- Develop Nordic indices, goals and standards for human development, the good society and cross-border freedom of movement
- Commission a task force to study the potential for saving resources by working together on research, staff training and education, and the procurement of equipment and medicine.

## **IV. Environmental and energy policy**

In future, political debate will inevitably focus to a greater extent on environmental and energy issues. Some people even think that we are moving towards an energy- and resource-driven economy, in which there will be less talk about kroner, euros and interest rates and more about kilowatts of power and natural resources. Climate, environment and energy issues are already crucial considerations in foreign and defence policy, and play an increasingly important role in debates about the economy.

In an energy- and resource-driven economy, the Nordic coun-

tries should not encounter any major problems fending for themselves. They are blessed with a range of valuable energy sources and other natural resources, and have spent decades making significant investments in the development of climate and energy-smart technology, e.g. wind power in Denmark, hydro-electricity in Norway and Sweden, geothermal energy in Iceland and bio-diesel fuels in Finland. Regarding environmental matters, the rest of the world often looks upon the Nordic countries as norm entrepreneurs. As is the case for welfare policy, there should be room to exploit this reputation further via proactive policy in international arenas.

The Nordic countries are always keen to join forces and promote stricter international environmental standards. They have realised that the stricter the requirement for renewable forms of energy, the greater the competitive advantage that they enjoy. We believe that the Nordic countries could go a step further and agree on far tougher climate and environment standards. Nordic environmental and climate objectives could exert considerable influence on international debate and raise the Region's profile as an environmental pioneer, not only in Europe but throughout the world. Stricter internal Nordic standards would, of course, entail difficult and expensive processes of change, both for business and industry and for ordinary people, but in the long run it is the only way that the Nordic countries will be able to maintain their leading position and the competitive advantages that come with it. If it proves too difficult to reach a consensus on major climate or environmental agreements, we could at least select a few issues and publicise them as Nordic objectives.

Tougher environmental and climate standards could perhaps be combined with proactive investment in research and innovation. It was only natural for the Nordic Council of Ministers' Top-level Research Initiative to focus on climate and the environment. It is also important to create a market for new, climate-smart and environmentally friendly technology. On their own, the Nordic countries

are often too small for new innovations to reach critical mass, and so it is important to put resources into developing joint regulations, standards and norms.

Energy issues have made the Nordic Region a key region in Europe. The Region has often been referred to as a European powerhouse, especially since Germany decided to do away with nuclear power. However, in geopolitical debates about energy and natural resources, the Nordic countries are unhelpfully small. Only by working together will they be able to protect their interests and guarantee that any exploitation of the natural resources of the Far North is done with due regard to the local population and environment.

It is true that there are profound conflicts of interest between the Nordic countries when it comes to energy policy. Norway sits on enormous reserves of oil, gas and hydro-electricity, Denmark traditionally relied on coal but is now a world leader in wind power, and nuclear power plays a major role in Finland and Sweden. This might suggest that the prospects for a joint Nordic energy policy are not good, but in fact the opposite is the case. The benefits of a Nordic Environment Community and a Nordic Energy Community would be huge – precisely because the countries complement each other. It is not just a question of Finnish industry needing Norwegian energy, it is also about being able to even out the fluctuations in the production of wind power and hydro-electricity.

The main benefit of a Nordic Environment Community and a Nordic Energy Community would be the emergence of a united Nordic voice that can face up to Russian, German and other interests. It is high time that leading Nordic politicians sit down and plan a joint environmental and energy-policy strategy, especially for the Arctic Region. To what extent is Norwegian gas or hydro-electricity capable of helping to build an infrastructure around the burgeoning mining industry in Northern Finland and Sweden? Seen from that perspective, the benefits of regional co-operation on energy are

so great that the real question is how long the Nordic countries can afford not to do it.

As far as the environment is concerned, Nordic ministers and NGOs already work very closely together. In relation to energy, the joint electricity market Nord Pool has been a great success and serves as a model for discussions about a single European electricity market. The next step would be to extend Nord Pool to cover not only the wholesale trade, but retail too. However, to make this happen, the political leaders involved in Nordic co-operation on the environment and energy will have to sit down together and discuss it with open minds. A good start might be to set up groups of experts that have a mandate to develop tangible initiatives for working together in certain predefined areas. A broader energy debate would also be required, in which Finnish expansion of nuclear power is discussed as a Nordic issue, and Norwegian hydroelectricity is regarded as something other than just a matter for local politicians.

**Key environmental and energy-policy recommendations:**

- Set up a Nordic Environmental Community and a Nordic Energy Community
- Set up working parties and think tanks and commission them to draw up Nordic strategies for the energy- and resource-driven economy of the future
- Draw up Nordic environmental and climate standards that are more ambitious than the European and international equivalents
- Focus on developing a joint Nordic market for new environmental and energy innovations via common standards
- Extend Nord Pool to cover the retail trade.

## v. Research, innovation, education and training

Study after study has shown that closer Nordic research co-operation is a necessity if our universities are to halt the brain drain and compete in the race to attract the world's leading researchers. Gustav Björkstrand's 2003 report primarily stressed the need to establish common cause in relation to large and expensive infrastructure, while many others emphasised the importance of more concerted joint research funding and of ensuring that qualifications are valid in all of the Nordic countries.

Plenty of positive proposals have been put forward. However, clear and radical political measures are required if the dream of the Region as a leader in research and innovation is to become a reality. We believe that only through a Nordic Research Community with a clear political direction will we be able to turn words into deeds. A Research Community would raise the profile of research in the Region and make it more international. It would offer the leading universities an opportunity to develop cutting-edge skills, while at the same time allowing for the kind of blue-skies research that is essential for real innovation.

A certain amount of progress has been made towards the goal of more concerted joint research funding. In the Hämeenlinna Declaration of 2009, the Finnish and Swedish governments agreed to open up national research funding to researchers in both countries, as a first step towards a Nordic solution. Subsequently, the education ministers have decided to look at the steps required to achieve this. However, progress is very slow and researchers in the Region have not yet noticed an effect in their day-to-day lives.

The easiest way to get joint research funding up and running would be to base a new system on the existing organisations NordForsk and Nordic Innovation, allocate them a significantly larger

proportion of the national research budgets, and ask them to drop the obligatory requirement for a minimum of three Nordic countries to be included in any given project. If NordForsk became the most prestigious and visible funding body in the Region, and researchers and centres competed with each other, this would provide a financial incentive that would help to make the Nordic aspect a natural part of every researcher's day-to-day life and work. NordForsk should also make it even easier for research centres to include non-Nordic partners in their networks and projects, which would effectively tie top non-Nordic researchers to Nordic research environments.

Knowledge of the Region itself is a small but important area that is rarely addressed adequately in discussions about research co-operation. Put bluntly, official co-operation has failed to identify this as a priority. International demand for knowledge about Nordic experiences in various areas, e.g. peace, local autonomy, welfare, equality and international co-operation, is growing. Some of these themes have been relatively well covered from a national perspective, but there has been surprisingly little research into them as Nordic themes and issues.

Above all, there is a major gap in research when it comes to actual Nordic co-operation itself. It may well be addressed in commemorative publications, but it is extremely rare that systematic and independent critical research is conducted into the subject (there are exceptions, such as *Norden i sicksack (The Nordic Countries Zigzag)*, 2000). Evaluations of the reforms in Nordic co-operation over the years have, to put it mildly, been inadequate. Insufficient attention has been paid to either successes, such as the setting up of the Nordic Council and Council of Ministers, or failures, such as the plans for a defence union, customs union or economic union (NORDEK), none of which came to pass. Nordic co-operation in the past two decades, a period dominated by the European Union, is another subject that very few researchers have looked at in any depth.

In particular, the comparative perspective, i.e. contrasting Nordic and non-Nordic experiences, is missing. The fact is that the rest of the world, especially Germany, conducts more (and in some cases, better) research into Nordic co-operation. A range of institutions in Europe, North America and Asia are devoted to Nordic or Scandinavian studies, but it is an under-prioritised area in the Region itself.

Needless to say, knowledge about the Region should also be prioritised elsewhere in society too, not just in a research context. It is important that we learn from each other's experiences, forge contacts and foster the sense of affinity needed if the Nordic countries are to continue to be able to work with each other. The neighbouring countries' languages, culture, history and political landscape should not feel alien. Schools can play a key role in this work, and we suggest that greater effort be put into exchange programmes for teachers and students.

#### **Key research, innovation, education and training recommendations:**

- Set up a Nordic Research Community
- Draw up a joint strategy for research, innovation, education and training
- Initiate Nordic research funding either by opening national sources up to each other or by making NordForsk and Nordic Innovation the leading funding bodies in the Region
- Prioritise knowledge of the Region in research and schools.

## **VI. Culture and language**

Cultural co-operation is still, in terms of both budget and participants, one of the biggest elements of Nordic co-operation. In recent years, a number of voices have criticised this Nordic “nation-building” as unnecessary and have called for cuts to the culture budget.

We believe that cultural co-operation is an absolutely necessary prerequisite for co-operation on top political priorities such as foreign and defence policy, or the economy and welfare. If we want the countries to work together on their pilot-training programme or on air-sea rescue, it is crucial that we improve the cultural and linguistic sense of community in the Region.

Multiple studies have shown that fewer people understand the neighbouring languages in the Region nowadays, especially in the three Scandinavian countries. This is a very worrying trend. The character and identity of the Region are based on the potential and privilege inherent in being able to communicate with one another in the Nordic languages, and it is of the utmost importance that education and culture provide greater opportunities for exposure to each other's languages. In a world where relocation and commuting across borders are increasingly common, it is essential that all of the Nordic languages are perceived as familiar and welcoming.

Having said that, it is also important that the Scandinavian languages do not become a prerequisite for all co-operation. A pig-headed attitude is counterproductive, and in the worst-case scenario it would lead to a divisive two-tier classification of Nordic citizens. We adopt a pragmatic approach to the fact that people in the Region increasingly communicate in English. Danish seems to be becoming more and more difficult for others to comprehend, and it is important that Finns, Icelanders and the Saami, as well as people who have come to the Region from elsewhere in the world, are included in co-operation. The question of the new role played by Nordic co-operation as a platform for broader international partnerships also makes English important. While it is a tremendous privilege to be able to avoid English in our own meetings, it is actually a necessity for dialogue between the Nordic Region and London, New York, Athens, Buenos Aires, Shanghai and Seoul.

One major problem is that the neighbouring Nordic countries tend to be absent from the national public domain. It is a paradox

that our countries share many of the same views of the world and the same political landscape, and yet we do not read each other's newspapers, or know about each other's politicians and celebrities. Our news programmes cover American presidential primaries in great depth, but ignore general elections next door.

Nevertheless, there is now greater potential for a Nordic public domain than was the case a few decades ago. The digital age allows anyone to take part in debates in any country. A number of TV channels and programmes broadcast simultaneously in two or more of the Nordic countries, and the number of Nordic trade magazines and websites has grown. All of the nations are also struggling to increase their own cultural exports in the face of Anglo-American hegemony. Co-ordinating these efforts would provide a boost to the individual countries.

What political measures can be taken to enhance the sense of cultural community in the Region and make progress toward a Nordic public domain? In the first instance, we think it is important to guarantee cultural autonomy. The politicians may discuss broad outlines and models for working together, and may even adopt specific measures to help maintain excellence and critical mass in certain areas. However, it is worthwhile remembering that the most successful Nordic cultural products have stemmed from leaving it up to those involved to decide what kind of partnership suits them best. Nordvision and the Nordic Film and TV Fund are both outstanding successes. The Nordic Cultural Fund is also highly respected, but its position could be strengthened by making it responsible for a larger proportion of the Council of Ministers' culture budget. Like NordForsk, the Cultural Fund could also drop the requirement for three Nordic countries to be involved in any given project, and instead try to raise its profile as a leading player in cultural policy in the Region.

Cultural co-operation is a precondition for working together at the top political level. However, we also believe that aspirational

and visible inter-governmental co-operation in the form of Nordic Communities would provide a major boost to the Nordic sense of cultural and linguistic community. By working together in a proactive and high-profile manner, politicians could make an invaluable contribution to bringing the countries closer together.

**Key culture- and language-policy recommendations:**

- Give Nordic cultural co-operation greater autonomy so that institutions such as the Nordic Cultural Fund, Nordvision and the Nordic Film and TV Fund are able to determine what kind of cultural partnerships are needed
- Provide government support for all of the Nordic languages via a variety of cultural and educational initiatives
- Facilitate co-operation between those involved in exporting cultural products.

## VII. Law and legislation

The Nordic welfare model and official Nordic co-operation can both legitimately trace their roots back to the legal co-operation that arose in the late 19th century. For over a hundred years, Nordic legislators, lawyers and legal scholars have met regularly and held seminars to discuss the challenges they face and to learn from each other's experiences. This has consolidated the uniquely Nordic legal culture. Even during the immediate post-war period, Nordic co-operation on legislation was intensive. It was in this spirit that the 1962 Helsinki Treaty was signed, which mentions legal co-operation as early as item number two.

Today, the Nordic countries could be said to be in violation of the Helsinki Treaty. The idea that legislation should be as harmonised as possible simply does not correspond with the current reality of the situation in the justice ministries. Like so many other

gatherings of experts, Nordic legal meetings have a tendency to degenerate into monologues by people wearing national blinkers, who just describe developments in their own backyards and are devoid of any ambition to generate proactive Nordic discussions about the problems and challenges that, for the most part, the countries still share.

There is no escaping the fact that the European Union has become a very dominant presence in the legal sphere – not just in legislation, but in research and practice too. However, it is important to reiterate that this EU dominance does not imply that the necessary conditions for Nordic legal co-operation have somehow disappeared. There is still much to gain from a proactive and forward-looking attitude to co-operation on legal matters. However, there are at present no clear political signals that legal co-operation is important and should be a priority. The best way to send this signal would be to set up a Nordic Law Community.

The EU does not control everything. First of all, the Nordic countries still have all of the preconditions for working together and harmonising legislation in areas where the Union does not dominate. The economic benefits of harmonising business law, for example, would doubtless be great. Secondly, a Law Community would also enhance Nordic co-operation in relation to the EU. Nordic countries have already exerted a certain degree of influence on EU legislation, e.g. on consumer affairs, welfare, gender equality and transparency, but there is still room for more co-ordinated and decisive collaboration. There are many issues in relation to which the Nordic countries will stand up and defend their own principles, traditions and experiences, e.g. in contract law and family law.

Thirdly, perhaps the most important area of current Nordic co-operation on legislation is the implementation of EU directives and regulations. The Freedom of Movement Forum regularly emphasises that new obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement are constantly emerging as a result of the Nordic countries choosing

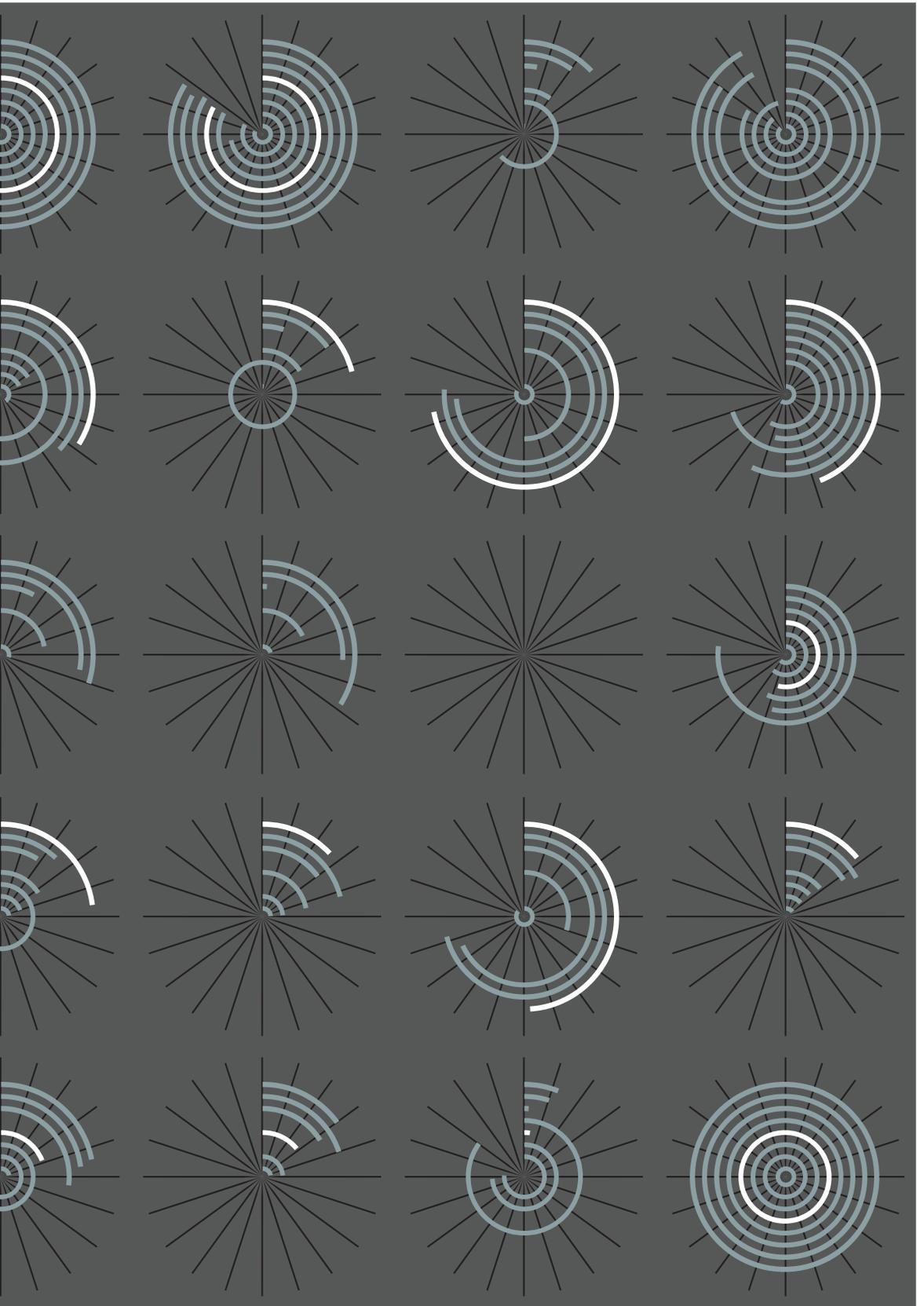
to interpret EU directives in different ways. During the freedom of movement debates held in the national parliaments in spring 2012, a number of good proposals were put forward, e.g. that every bill should be subjected to a Nordic impact assessment or referred to the other countries for consideration. Thomas Wilhelmsson at the University of Helsinki has suggested a joint Nordic working party to study how EU directives are incorporated into national legislation in the Region. This would effectively ensure that the level of legal expertise is as high as possible, even within more restricted fields. In the long term, Wilhelmsson envisages a division of responsibilities that would entail each country having primary responsibility for the areas in which they happen to have the greatest expertise.

One thing does not necessarily exclude the other. Impact assessments would be relatively easy to implement, but would not constitute an obstacle to experimenting with working parties on the implementation of EU directives, particularly in areas where national expertise is limited, or in relation to issues that are of special and obvious joint Nordic interest (such as consumer affairs or family issues).

**Key legal recommendations:**

- Set up a Nordic Law Community
- Resume harmonisation of legislation as a primary objective of co-operation
- Set up working parties and commission research to build proactive co-operation in relation to the EU
- Require that every new bill of relevance to the whole Region is subjected to a Nordic impact assessment
- Set up joint working parties to study the implementation of new EU directives.





# 3

## Official Nordic co-operation

It is both easy and common to criticise the Nordic Council and Council of Ministers. They are accused of being lumbering, bureaucratic and sloth-like organisations that generate little in the way of tangible results. Often, but not always, the criticism is based on unrealistic expectations and misunderstandings of the organisations' roles. Many people see them almost as a Nordic parliament and government, although in reality they are simply organs that facilitate co-operation between parliaments and governments. This form of criticism bears witness to a desire for a closer working relationship and greater impact.

As international bodies go, the Council and Council of Ministers are highly respected among the Region's politicians and people. They are also enjoying a growing reputation elsewhere in the world, which suggests that they do many things right. However, it is also increasingly obvious that the structure established in the 1950s and '70s is no longer completely fit for purpose, and should be adapted to reflect a changing world and a Europe that looks very different to how it was even a few short years ago.

The Nordic Council and Council of Ministers are well aware of this and have repeatedly discussed how co-operation could be revamped. For example, the report from the Panel of Wise Men, *Open to the Winds of Change* (2000), contained many good suggestions about what form official collaboration could take in the light of the new challenges posed by globalisation. However, it must be said

that these studies and proposals have led to very little in the way of actual reforms.

We think that the impetus for change is now even greater, and so is the political will to reform official co-operation. We therefore present an outline of official co-operation that responds to the following current challenges:

- The increasing importance of the regions and regional co-operation in Europe and beyond
- The need to present a Nordic face to the world
- The demand for greater flexibility in co-operation
- The demand for tangible and visible results
- The risk of a democratic deficit in international bodies.

Our proposals revolve around setting up Nordic Communities in a number of prioritised areas, in order to combine well-publicised, aspirational and results-oriented inter-governmental co-operation with major efforts to encourage political and social debate. Stepping up co-operation in selected policy areas does not imply lowering the overall level of ambition for co-operation. On the contrary, we believe that it is only by acknowledging that different policy areas face different conditions that we can take the necessary step forward. In the long term, certain Communities could be developed into what might be called a sectoral federation, based on something approaching a joint Nordic policy. However, this is not essential, and does not necessarily have to be a goal. Instead, we must try to develop a new, supple and flexible form of international co-operation, in which form and content are determined on a case-by-case basis.

One obvious objection to these Communities is that they could potentially be incompatible with other national commitments, not least EU obligations. However, this should not be a major problem. In fact, there is good reason to believe that this is what the Europe

of the future will look like. Most countries will, of course, be in the EU, and perhaps also NATO, but formal membership of these organisations will play less of a role, since all nations will be interwoven with each other, via different layers of sectoral organisations and co-operation structures with partially overlapping functions and objectives. Under this European model, the Nordic countries could play an important and decisive role in far-reaching and highly ambitious, but also democratically anchored, partnerships in specific policy areas.

The most difficult challenge for a Nordic Community is to assure the democratic support that is critical for international co-operation. The Nordic Council is, of course, important in this context, but we believe it is essential that intergovernmental co-operation also endeavours to involve specialists, journalists, Nordic institutions and NGOs in a wider debate on working together. In order to provide the democratic foundations for a far-reaching and ambitious collaboration, the governments must first create the conditions for a critical discussion with a broad social basis.

## **I. The Nordic Council of Ministers**

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official body for inter-governmental collaboration. It has a budget of just under DKK 1 billion, which also covers the activities of the Nordic Council and the Nordic Cultural Fund, as well as several other institutions in various fields. At present, the Council of Ministers comprises ten ministerial councils covering different policy areas, plus one comprising the ministers for Nordic co-operation, whose task is to assist the prime ministers in the management and co-ordination of official co-operation. Each ministerial council has a committee of senior officials composed of national civil servants who prepare and follow up on cases. The Council of Ministers' Secretariat, based in Copen-

hagen, is responsible for the administrative workload and has just under a hundred members of staff. The Secretariat prepares cases and arranges meetings for the various ministerial councils and committees of senior officials, and has the right and duty to propose its own initiatives. Although it is also responsible for monitoring the follow-up at national level on decisions made by the Council of Ministers, the Secretariat has no formal power to force governments to do anything.

The Council of Ministers was set up in the early 1970s in the wake of the failed NORDEK project on economic co-operation. We might say that the Council of Ministers is based on Wetterbergian logic – in that the idea was to find a comprehensive, uniform solution, albeit one that did not have any supranational authority. This worked well for a long period. The Council of Ministers rejuvenated official co-operation and many new Nordic institutions and projects emerged.

More and more people think that the Council of Ministers is no longer the best way to organise the way that the countries work together. For historical reasons, there are no ministerial councils for foreign and defence policy, which currently generate the majority of the headlines about co-operation. In addition, there still seems to be a desire for a more or less all-embracing set-up. The number of ministerial councils may have been reduced from 18 to 11 in 2006, but identical bodies still exist for virtually every area of policy – both those in which co-operation is flourishing, and those in which the current conditions are not particularly conducive to ambitious co-operation at government level.

A typical criticism of the Council of Ministers is that it is an unwieldy and bureaucratic organisation lacking in clear political substance and direction. Various factions blame each other for its de-politicisation and for civil servants being in control. The Council of Ministers' Secretariat in Copenhagen complains that national civil servants on the committees of senior officials are uninterested

in the Nordic perspective and put the brakes on initiatives and ideas before they reach ministerial level. National officials criticise the Secretariat for acting without the necessary political approval from national ministers, and for pretending to be a Nordic Commission.

What kind of ministerial councils does Nordic co-operation need today? This depends, of course, on the kind of co-operation we want. If the ultimate goal is a federal state, then it is beyond doubt that what is needed is a single, all-encompassing intergovernmental body and that the Council of Ministers should develop in the direction of a strong commission, as per the EU model, with a far-reaching right to dictate policy in the Nordic countries. However, if a federal state is not the objective, then we should abandon the idea of all-encompassing and uniform bodies and distance ourselves from the idea of a Commission.

The fact that conditions differ from one area of policy to the other is implicitly acknowledged in the Council of Ministers' budget, which clearly prioritises certain ministerial councils over the others. This could be made more explicit by setting up Communities in some areas and considering whether the ministerial councils that exist under the current model are really needed in others. In certain cases, we could perhaps find other, less cumbersome forms of co-operation – regular ministerial meetings might be sufficient to maintain political contacts. In some areas, we might also consider giving greater autonomy to those actually involved in the activities, e.g. by transferring the culture budget to the Nordic Cultural Fund.

As things stand, it is important to be as clear as possible about the fact that it is the prime ministers and the governments who are responsible for official co-operation and that the role of the Council of Ministers' Secretariat is to support and facilitate co-operation and contacts between national ministries. Given the sheer volume of directives and expectations currently emanating from Brussels, it is perhaps no surprise that ministers and their officials react negatively to bold statements from the Secretariat.

Nordic co-operation needs a clear policy direction from the national governments. Today, the big problem with intergovernmental co-operation is the lack of involvement of the ministries. The committees of senior officials are often too effective a brake on political initiative. Ministers should be more involved in debates in order to endow them with real political content. Our proposal for Nordic Communities is based on this fundamental idea, and the Communities concept is designed to enable more direct solutions to be developed within a shorter time scale.

### *What would Nordic co-operation look like if we created it today?*

During work on this report, we co-hosted a seminar at Voksenåsen, near Oslo, which started with the question “What would official Nordic co-operation look like if we created it today?” The seminar came up with plenty of good ideas, but nobody pointed out the obvious – that this question is not merely hypothetical. Over the last 20 years, the Nordic countries have created from scratch a new type of co-operation on defence policy, one that is now formalised within the framework of NORDEFECO.

We believe that, in many ways, NORDEFECO could serve as a model for our proposed Communities. NORDEFECO is a relatively light and flexible organisation with a clear political direction at ministerial level. It has a rotating chair, a steering committee that takes care of practical work and a small secretariat whose main task is to organise meetings, and it sets up working parties with a clear remit to address specific topics. NORDEFECO is characterised, from top to bottom, by its fundamental objective, i.e. identifying projects that benefit the national armed forces.

Nordic Communities should derive their authority from a document signed by the ministries involved, in the style of the “memorandum of understanding” that forms the basis for NORDEFECO. As

a management and co-ordination body, a Community should have a ministerial council, preferably with a rotating chair, but otherwise the ministers themselves could agree on the kind of objectives and structure they want, which would help facilitate a move away from the “committee of senior officials” model. A Community’s ministerial council could have its own secretariat and perhaps, like NORDEF-CO, a management team to take care of the practical work. However, it would have to be clear that responsibility lies with the ministers – they could set up working parties to pursue ideas, or convene groups similar to think tanks to conduct independent studies of new ways to develop co-operation. The ministerial council could also host debates in the national parliaments or in forums for discussion involving politicians, experts and NGOs.

As previously mentioned, we think the time is ripe for NORDEF-CO-like Communities in the areas of foreign policy, environmental policy and legal co-operation. Revitalisation of co-operation on welfare and the development of co-operation in the energy sector would also be important improvements. However, Communities do not need to involve a whole sector. They could have a more specific focus, or be commissioned in response to a particular challenge, e.g. a Nordic Consumer Community, Nordic Gender-equality Community, a Nordic Research Fellowship, a Nordic Health-care Community, a Nordic Film and TV Community, etc.

The important thing is that the ministers use the new Community to send a clear political signal that co-operation in this area is important and deserves to be strengthened. This is another reason why it may be wise to begin work on the new model by first selecting certain priority areas.

### *From consensus to modules*

For a long time, inter-governmental co-operation has been based on the consensus principle, meaning that every new initiative requires

the endorsement of all of the countries. From a historical point of view, this principle has played a significant role in bestowing popular legitimacy on the co-operation and ensuring that all countries feel included in the Nordic family. However, in recent years, it has become increasingly clear that the requirement for consensus has been holding back co-operation, and that the nation with the least political will has been able to set the pace.

In a proper federal state, the consensus principle would quickly be replaced by majority decisions. A Community led by a ministerial council would introduce procedures that allowed two or three countries to go ahead without having to wait for the others (the so-called “opt-out” model). The Communities would have to be based on a model similar to NORDEFECO, with a number of programmes or modules that countries can choose to opt into or out of. Of course, the door must also be left open for them to join at a later stage.

This internal flexibility could be supplemented by external flexibility. We believe that it is important that the Nordic Region boosts its profile as a region, not just as a collection of Northern Europeans. However, in many projects led by the new Communities, it would be justifiable to include countries outside the Region itself, especially Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. For example, it would be important to involve Russia and Poland in environmental matters relating to the Baltic Sea. Germany would be an important partner in a Nordic Energy Community. On many other issues, there is probably scope for closer co-operation with the Netherlands or the United Kingdom.

### *Greater role for the prime ministers and ministers for Nordic co-operation*

One of Wetterberg’s weightiest arguments was that only an all-embracing federal state would be able to generate the continuity and holistic perspective that would make genuine political negotiation possible between the countries. While Finland may not have a

great deal to offer Norway in a Nordic Energy Community, a genuine federal state would mean that Norway would be able to sell its resources in return for Finnish expertise in the areas of education or information technology. Similarly, Denmark would be able to provide agricultural products or wind-power technologies in the other national markets, Sweden could provide industrial products, Iceland could offer fish, the Finns wood and cellulose products and so on.

We have been unable to identify any fundamental barriers to constructing negotiating mechanisms, including forms of official co-operation based on Nordic Communities, for a range of policy areas. It seems only natural that the prime ministers would have the ultimate responsibility for inter-governmental co-operation, just as they have since the early 1990s. Aided by the co-operation ministers, they would have to maintain an overview of all areas of co-operation and have the courage to make agreements that transcend those areas.

Over the years, communication between the prime ministers and co-operation ministers has often been rather inadequate. We think that the governments should consider linking the co-operation ministers directly to the prime ministers' offices. This would be an important signal that Nordic co-operation is a top priority and is not just any old international commitment.

## **II. The Nordic Council**

The Nordic Council is the central body for inter-parliamentary co-operation. It consists of 87 members appointed by their national and devolved parliaments, as well as representatives of their governments. The Council gathers for an annual regular session in the autumn, which serves as a meeting place for the parliaments and governments. It also gathers for a theme session in the spring.

The Nordic Council is headed by a Presidium, and the work is done by five national delegations, three delegations from the devolved parliaments, five party-political groups and five specialist committees, as well as a Control Committee and a Budget Committee. The Council has no formal powers, but submits recommendations to the Council of Ministers and national governments. It also processes proposals submitted by the Council of Ministers. The Council has a secretariat in the same building as the Council of Ministers' Secretariat in Copenhagen, as well as national secretariats in the various parliaments and five small party-group secretariats.

The Council was established in 1952 and immediately attained a prominent position in Nordic political life. The Presidium consisted of top national politicians and enjoyed great prestige among the national governments and parliaments. The annual sessions brought together all of the leading politicians from both the governments and the opposition parties in each of the countries, and were followed closely by the media. In the 1970s, these sessions were so popular that restricting the number of journalists was discussed.

These days, the Nordic Council has lost some of its former allure. The prime ministers dutifully turn up at the sessions, as do many ministers, but the delegations no longer consist of the top national politicians and the sessions barely rate a mention in the mass media. There are many reasons for this. The introduction of separate inter-governmental co-operation, in the form of the Council of Ministers, certainly played a role, as did the generally weakened role of parliaments in relation to their governments. However, the most important factor has been the emergence over the years of a wide range of other international bodies that compete for the attention of Nordic MPs.

Perhaps the most common criticisms levelled at the Council today concern the lack of policy and debate. It does not have any formal powers – recommendations are its main instrument – and therefore there is an obvious risk of the Council being little more

than a talking shop or social gathering. This places a heavy responsibility on the members to be active, to provide tangible political input and to stimulate debate.

Another criticism directed at official Nordic co-operation is that it is too slow. As the Council meets only twice a year, it is difficult to maintain a continuous debate and to follow up on the various recommendations and initiatives. It often takes a very long time before national governments and ministers get down to work on the Council's recommendations, which is hardly very inspiring for politicians who want to be assessed on the basis of results. In the worst cases, initiatives fall by the wayside or are obstructed by civil servants or a committee of senior officials before they reach the political level. Politicians therefore have little reason to turn to the Council as their first port of call when they want to pursue a particular issue.

### *National delegations and party groups*

In recent years, a number of reforms have been instigated that were designed to create space for more policy and debate in the Nordic Council. When the Council was first set up, it was seen as an agency for co-operation between MPs and government representatives from five different countries. The whole structure revolved around national delegations that would meet during sessions to discuss issues among themselves. In the 1980s, in an attempt to boost co-operation, Council members were given the option to form party groups. A number of subsequent reforms have aimed to enhance the role of these groups.

To what extent these reforms have succeeded is open to question. Some think that they have just added an extra administrative layer, with its own secretariats, who arrange their own meetings, without acting as any sort of real link between the national parties and the Council. For their part, the party groups complain that

they are still treated as subordinate to the national delegations, that Council members receive their information via the delegation secretariats and that it is mainly through the national delegations that they form their opinion on issues. Council members are still primarily considered to be representatives of their countries, rather than parties.

In all international bodies, there is an inherent conflict between what people have in common, national concerns and ideological standpoints. However, we believe that the Nordic Council currently suffers from a significant lack of clarity on this point. It is clear that there is a need for debate both between countries and between parties, but much would be gained if the Council, in purely structural terms, focused on one or the other. In relation to inter-governmental co-operation, we have chosen to highlight the role and responsibility of the national governments, but as far as inter-parliamentary co-operation is concerned, we think more would be gained by clearly stressing the role of party groups at the expense of the national delegations. After all, in practice it is the governments that are responsible for co-operation. It is our view, therefore, that the Council should assume the role of a political body that seeks to generate discussion based on ideological and political differences rather than national ones.

Enhancing the role of the party groups presupposes that their chairs and secretariats would play a bigger role – for example, assuming responsibility for some of the work currently done by the national delegations. One consequence of this would be that the groups would have to appoint a contact person in each national parliament, who would be responsible for this work. The party groups would also need the resources to work meaningfully together outside of the sessions, e.g. by convening meetings or hosting seminars to discuss Nordic policies.

The nature of the current party groups varies greatly. While the Social Democrats and the Conservatives are relatively homogeneous

and well organised, the Centre Group in particular is considerably more heterogeneous. If the role of the party groups is to be strengthened by the Council, then it should perhaps better reflect the forms of co-operation that exist between the parties outside the Council.

### *The Nordic Council and the Nordic Communities*

The Nordic Council is the hub of political debate about the Region and plays a key role in bestowing democratic legitimacy on the inter-governmental co-operation. While the latter does not need to be all-encompassing, the Nordic Council must have the courage to discuss every aspect of co-operation – both in areas where a Community is feasible and in those where the co-operation is more informal. It is important that the Council generates political debate about the Region at all times, and acts as a source of new ideas and proposals. The fact that the problem of cross-border freedom of movement has finally received systematic attention, and that many of the *Stoltenberg Report's* proposals, such as the embassy projects, originally stem from the Council, shows that inter-parliamentary co-operation is important and can produce new and relevant ideas.

Nordic Council committees have often been criticised as not fit for purpose, or because they are not in systematic contact with similar committees in the national parliaments. In recent years, some progress has been made in encouraging Council delegates to sit on the same committees as they do in their own parliaments. It has also been suggested that the Council committees should consist of, or at least include, the chairs and deputy chairs of national parliamentary committees, or that they should designate specific individuals who would be responsible for feedback to their committees at home. A third proposal is to entirely abandon the system of theme committees and instead create *ad hoc* working parties to address specific issues.

Nordic Communities should definitely be matched by Council

committees. It is an anachronism that there are at present no committees for foreign and defence policy. Both NORDEFECO and the accelerating collaboration on foreign affairs suffer from a democratic deficit, which can only impede and restrict co-operation. The fact that the Council does not systematically tackle the policy areas that steal the headlines in Nordic co-operation doubtless contributes to its marginalisation.

### **III. A Nordic network think tank**

As previously mentioned, official Nordic co-operation does not have a Commission with a mandate to manage, but the Council of Ministers' Secretariat has a right and a duty to submit proposals and come up with initiatives. There is an unquestionable need to monitor co-operation and come up with initiatives and ideas for its future development. However, it is less clear that the Secretariat should play this role. In fact, this dual role may well lie behind the misunderstandings and irritation that sometimes characterises the relationship between the Secretariat and the national ministries.

Greater clarity about these roles would be welcome. We therefore propose a clearer distinction between the Secretariat's formal and substantive activities. A more sensible structure would consist of a purely civil-service secretariat tasked with convening meetings of ministers and senior officials, supplemented by a more independent organisation – a think tank or policy unit – tasked with studying how well official co-operation is working and coming up with ideas for its future development.

The most important task for this new unit would be to pave the way for ongoing political debate about the Region outside of the Nordic Council. It would participate in the debate in the various countries, produce and commission studies and reports, and organise seminars – both on its own initiative and/or at the behest

of the various ministerial councils/Communities and the Nordic Council. This would also provide a home for the Freedom of Movement Forum and similar bodies.

In the current political and economic climate, any proposal for a new institution is unlikely to arouse much enthusiasm among politicians. However, what we are proposing is an entity that takes advantage of the best of the existing practices within Nordic co-operation and makes optimal use of the Region's unique, pre-existing network of experts, institutions and centres. Only this kind of body is really capable of closing the gap between experts on the one hand, and civil servants and politicians on the other. It would require a relatively small staff, consisting of both generalists and specialists (researchers, journalists, ex-politicians and civil servants). Ideally, it would be located in Stockholm, which is currently under-represented in terms of official Nordic institutions.

### *Nordic forums*

One of the think tank's main tasks would be to serve as a link between research and policy. The gap between them has been growing ever wider for some considerable time – politicians have less and less time to familiarise themselves with academic research, while researchers are increasingly being forced to prioritise international journals rather than the dissemination of their research results to a wider audience.

One way in which the think tank could contribute to a dialogue between research and policy would be – within the framework of the Communities – to organise wide-ranging and ambitious forums, e.g. modelled on Sweden's Society and Defence, where ministers, parliamentarians, researchers, the Nordic institutions and NGOs would meet to discuss burning issues. It is not difficult to imagine a Nordic Welfare Forum, a Nordic Defence Forum, a Nordic Multicultural Forum or a Nordic Gender Forum. These would not only create

a platform and environment for debate, but also serve as an important part of the jigsaw that will provide the democratic foundation for official co-operation. There will be a need for initiatives to be presented on a broader public platform, especially in areas with aspirational, result-based Communities.

The Globalisation Forum, which the Council of Ministers runs within the framework of the globalisation initiative, was a good idea that has unfortunately evolved into a series of summits at prime ministerial level. Disappointingly, the actual idea – providing a place for dialogue between politics, research, business and NGOs – was shoved into the background. If a think tank organised these forums and had the resources to invite top international names from the worlds of politics, research and business, the ideas would have a greater chance of success.

#### **iv. The Nordic institutions**

The Council of Ministers runs and funds a large number of institutions that have different forms of organisation and varying degrees of autonomy. In recent years, the Council of Ministers has been criticised for closing institutions, networks or programmes, such as the Nordic Gender Institute (NIKK), the seminars for first-time authors on Biskops-Arnö, Nordklang and the Nordic Literature and Library Committee (Nordbok), in favour of running fixed-term projects. The justification behind the restructuring and closures was to generate space for new ventures and projects.

It is undeniably important that decision-makers are free to set their own priorities and decide what they will work on. This is one way of politicising co-operation, and from this perspective, it is certainly a good idea to earmark a pool both in the Council of Ministers' budget for special priorities and in the budget of the annual Presidency. However, doing this at the expense of institutions is a

dangerous development. The institutions are the Region's lungs and are an indispensable part of official co-operation's critical mass.

In the absence of a genuine Nordic public and media debate, institutions are needed as forums for real discussion and to evaluate and review official co-operation. The institutions each have their own identity, symbols, history and practices, and serve as independent arenas in which individuals compete for power and influence.

It is clear that there will be great variation in how well institutions operate, and that they will require continuous evaluation and monitoring if they are to avoid the consequences of failing to fulfil their remit. However, transforming institutions into projects must not become an end in itself. Former Swedish Minister of Culture Bengt Göransson coined the term "projektos" to describe the short-term thinking that leads to institutions being turned into projects. Project funding and institutional support must not be allowed to cancel each other out – both are needed. In particular, it is important to distinguish between what constitutes a project and what does not. After all, projects that are renewed year after year hardly bear witness to political dynamism.

## **v. Unofficial and official co-operation**

Many forms of co-operation are, of course, not funded by the Council of Ministers. It is often said that what makes Nordic co-operation so special is that it is not only controlled from the top, but consists of myriad different networks in all sectors and at all levels of society. It involves almost every type of Nordic group, as well as professional groups, trade unions, religious denominations and sporting, environmental and human-rights organisations. The Nordic Region has been called an aggregate of small countries with close historical

and cultural ties, and some scholars have described co-operation as a spider's web of integration.

In terms of official co-operation, this web represents under-exploited potential. Many researchers see popular movements and NGOs as a possible solution to the problem of the democratic deficit in international work. Previously, it was far more common in official co-operation to circulate proposals and recommendations to movements and NGOs for consultation. We think this is a positive tradition, and one worth developing. The Norden Associations are particularly important in this regard, as they constitute the only popular movement that has Nordic co-operation as its purpose and basic idea. However, the Council of Nordic Trade Unions and a whole spectrum of other Nordic organisations are also important.

## **VI. Informal co-operation at the official level**

It is not only the fact that it often takes place through unofficial channels, in all sectors of society and at all levels, that makes Nordic co-operation unique. Its frequently informal character is also unique. Thanks to the many contacts that exist between individuals in different countries, co-operation does not always require official meetings and procedures. Instead, people just call or write to colleagues in neighbouring countries to discuss shared problems, or to hear how they solved a particular problem.

Co-operation based on personal contacts and relationships can, of course, be problematic from a democratic perspective, as it is sometimes difficult to identify the governance mechanism. However, when underpinned by formal structures and processes, it represents a highly flexible and cost-effective way of working together across borders.

Informal Nordic co-operation at official level currently faces a range of challenges. Evidence suggests that our civil servants' and

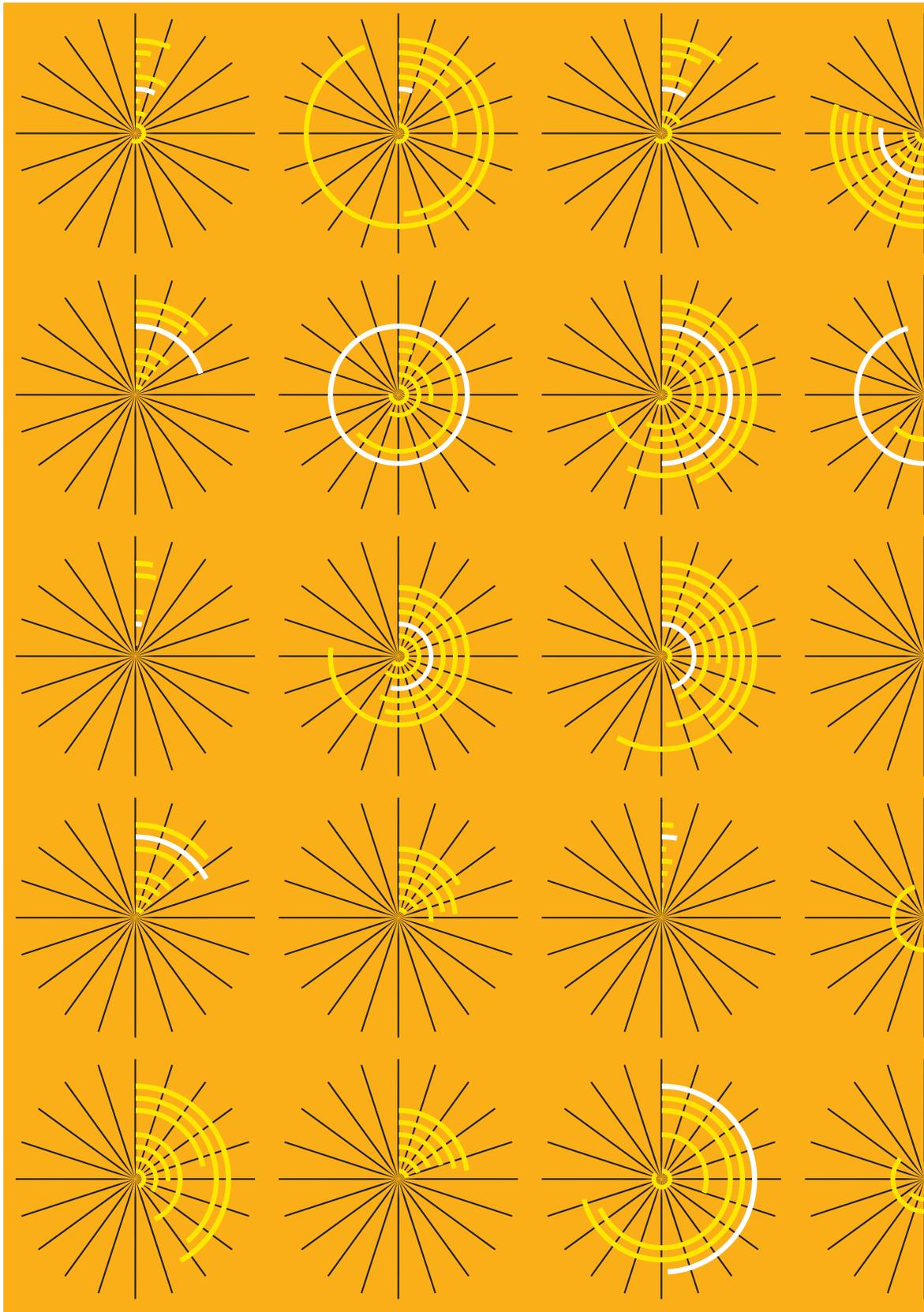
politicians' contacts and networks are deteriorating. One major reason for this is that they no longer have as much time to devote to Nordic co-operation. While in the past people were able to travel to seminars or meetings that lasted several days, it is now considered a major sacrifice to devote a whole afternoon to a particular meeting. Another reason is that labour-market and employment conditions have changed, meaning that the same person no longer does the same job for decades. This lack of continuity makes it harder to forge and maintain personal contacts. Another important reason is the ongoing process of generational change. In many cases, the informal contacts are associated with people who started work back in the golden age of the 1970s, and had many years to build their networks. This generation is now retiring, and there is, therefore, an obvious risk that ministries will lose a valuable Nordic resource and skill set.

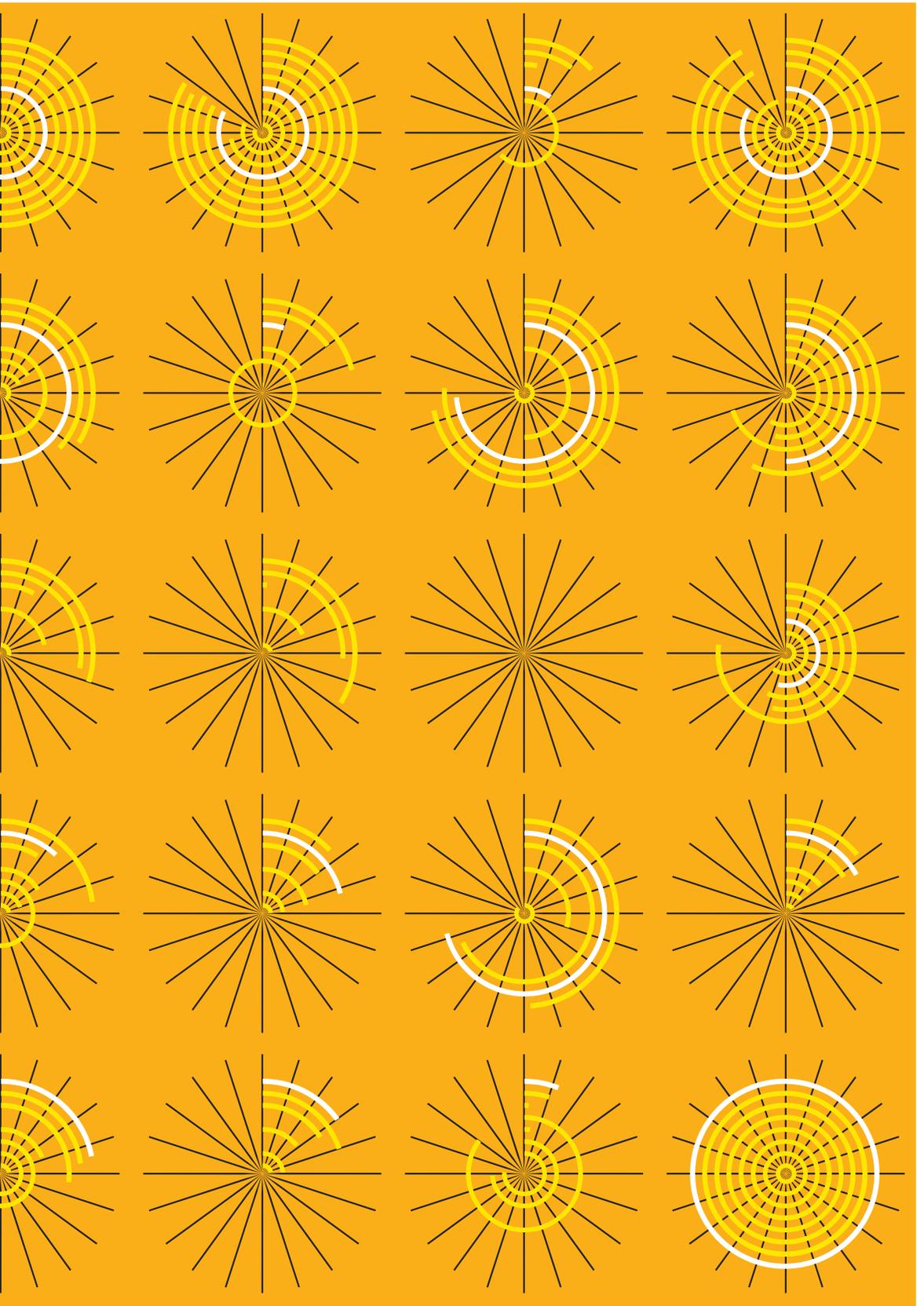
There is, therefore, a need for measures to retain the benefits derived from informal co-operation. At the Freedom of Movement Forum's legislation conference in 2011, it was proposed that a virtual contacts directory be drawn up for the ministries, so that people have easy access to the appropriate official in a neighbouring country. We propose that the national ministries set up mentoring programmes in which older officials pass on their contacts and knowledge to their successors. The form of these programmes may vary according to the person or need, but they should at least include visits to the other Nordic countries. Intensive courses could also be run at Nordic-level meetings, and an exchange programme could be developed for civil servants.

## Outline of official Nordic co-operation

	<b>Nordic Communities</b>	<b>Other areas of co-operation</b>
<b>The Nordic Council of Ministers</b>	Ministerial councils with their own secretariats	Ministerial council or meeting of ministers
<b>The Nordic Council</b>	Council committees for each Community	Maintain debate and appoint <i>ad hoc</i> committees
<b>Nordic network think tank</b>	Working groups and independent critical discussion	
<b>Nordic forums</b>	Think tank to organise Nordic forums in areas covered by Communities	Think tank organises Nordic forums as needed
<b>Nordic institutions</b>	Take the initiative and participate in debate	Take the initiative and participate in the debate, but can also take primary responsibility (Nordic Culture Fund)
<b>Civic organisations</b>	Take the initiative and participate in debate	







# 4

## The Nordic brand

There has been a great deal of talk about branding and new public diplomacy in recent years. A key message in both the Finnish Institute of Foreign Affairs' report, *Norden – making a difference* and *The Nordic Region as a Global Winner Region* by the think-tank Monday Morning (2005) was that “Norden” (the Nordic Region) and “the Nordic model” are strong brands that ought to be more effectively exploited by the countries of the Region. The question of branding the Region is important but delicate. Every entrepreneur knows that it takes decades to build up a good brand, but only a moment to destroy it.

Given the dangers that stem from an increasingly polarised Europe, it is vitally important to avoid self-glorification and simplistic marketing strategies. In the Nordic Region, we have an unfortunate tradition of saying that our values are better than other countries' values or that we are better able to live up to the values that Europe and the West see as universal. We are better at equality, better at justice, better at respecting women, better able to show solidarity with our fellow human beings, better at keeping our promises, better able to comply with laws and regulations and better at protecting the environment. Marketing based on superior attitudes like this is, at best, meaningless, as it is based on values cherished by the people of almost any country. However, there is also a danger that it will be perceived as nationalistic and chauvinistic, in which case the Region stands to lose more than it gains.

There has long been curiosity about the Region and its experiences from elsewhere in the world, and that interest still seems to be growing. Politicians, researchers and cultural practitioners from different parts of Europe, the United States, China and Korea are interested in our long history of peace, our welfare states and our democratic traditions, particularly with regard to popular movements and local autonomy. As far as culture is concerned, Nordic design, film and literature – especially crime novels – attract international interest. The Nordic countries are also well established in the music industry, with Sweden closely associated with good pop music since the days of ABBA, while Finland has a reputation in both classical music and heavy metal. Nordic nature is also highly attractive for tourists, whether it's Iceland's fabulous landscapes, Lapland, the Norwegian fjords, the Danish West Coast, or the Finnish and the Swedish archipelagos.

In order to maintain and strengthen the Nordic brand, it is of the utmost importance to be able to respond to this interest and curiosity in a professional and courteous manner. We believe that it is important to invest in skills and in knowledge about the Nordic countries. Increasingly, the world sees the countries as a region and as a unit, but within the Region, much of our thinking retains a national perspective. Very few people and institutions have real expertise about the Nordic welfare model, the gender model, the security model, Nordic organisations, the low level of corruption or the various cultural sectors.

Secondly, we believe that it is important to tailor branding strategies so that they take into account the fact that the Region is actually an ambiguous and flexible concept. "Nordic" means different things in Helsinki, Oslo, Berlin, New Delhi, Rio de Janeiro and New York. The Region has different connotations in different policy areas, research disciplines and cultural genres. A committee of senior officials or a consultancy company in Copenhagen or Stockholm can only do so much to build up efficient and dynamic brands for

us. Successful campaigns require in-depth market research, and the needs of the international arenas are crucial. Therefore, it is important for different kinds of independent actors in key international arenas to assess local demand for the Region and its output. Support the companies, researchers and cultural workers who need the Nordic brand and let them independently develop a dialogue with non-Nordic players. Embassies can offer support, but their job is to represent the countries in an official capacity. They are not qualified to represent the Region's culture, research and businesses.

The Nordic prizes are one effective way in which the Council and Council of Ministers embellish the brand. The literature prize is without doubt the most successful of all marketing efforts based on official co-operation. The film prize also enjoys high status. Should similar prizes be considered in other cultural spheres – in sport, journalism or research? Within the framework of the globalisation initiative, a Nordic Innovation Prize was discussed – but what happened to that discussion? It is not a question of resources. It would not be difficult to involve foundations or sponsors if we did not want to fund these prizes with tax money. It is, of course, very difficult to predict how well established a prize will become, and the sheer number of prizes may even dilute the effect. The Nordic Council already faces particular challenges with its music and environmental prizes, but positive proposals have been tabled to make the concepts more effective.

### *Co-operation as a brand*

Another, related way of exploiting and bolstering the brand would be to develop Nordic standards, goals or indices in particular spheres, e.g. welfare, the environment or perhaps research (as an alternative to the Anglo-American monopoly). The Nordic ecolabel (the Swan) is already well established, but we could also work toward launching “Nordic Climate Targets”, a “Nordic Council of

Ministers' Social Welfare Index" or a "Nordic Council Freedom of Movement Index". These could potentially have great political significance in the Region and beyond, but they must be developed by professionals and marketed well if they are to work properly.

Co-operation itself can also be of crucial importance when building a brand. The Region is well placed to take important initiatives in key debates on the future of international and regional co-operation, and on the potential for transnational democracy or citizenship. We have to seize this unique opportunity to create a third golden age for Nordic co-operation. External factors are not a hindrance to co-operation in the Region – on the contrary, all the indications are that the importance of the regions is increasing in Europe.

The vision outlined in this book is based on prioritising areas where we have identified huge potential for working more closely together. We propose Nordic Communities as the vehicle for flexible and ambitious inter-governmental co-operation in these areas, focusing on tangible and visible results. This would be combined with major efforts to stimulate political and social debate, which is particularly essential given the concerns about the democratic deficit in international work, especially in the EU.

We are convinced that smart and flexible co-operation, based on solid democratic foundations, is the best possible advertisement for the Nordic brand. There is broad consensus that Nordic co-operation needs to be strengthened, but a clear vision has often been lacking. Today, there are three on the table. Stoltenberg gave us one based on ambitious, voluntary inter-governmental co-operation in the field of foreign and security policy. Wetterberg, in turn, advocated an increasingly all-embracing federal state. In this book we, at the Centre for Nordic Studies, present a vision based on flexible Nordic Communities.

The ball is now in the politicians' court.



# List of people involved in the research for this book

The people on this list have in one way or another contributed to the work of the study. Some have attended a seminar, others have been part of a team, a few have participated in a panel discussion or been interviewed. All deserve our gratitude. They cannot, of course, be held responsible for the ideas expressed in the book.

Kristina Aaltonen, Secretary to the Social Democratic Group on the  
Nordic Council

Halldór Ásgrímsson, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of  
Ministers

Svein Ivar Angell, researcher, Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies,  
University of Bergen

Professor Clive Archer, University of Manchester

Sinikka Bohlin, former President of the Nordic Council

Silja Borgarsdóttir Sandelin, member of the Presidium of the Nordic  
Youth Council

Kenneth Broman, Director, special assignments, General Secretary's Office, Nordic Council of Ministers

Professor Christopher Browning, University of Warwick

Loa Brynjulfsdottir, General Secretary of the Council of Nordic Trade Unions

Professor Hans Erich Bödeker, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main

Tarja Cronberg MEP, Finland

Matthias Dornfeldt, Aspen Institute, Berlin

Kjetil Duvold, lecturer, Södertörn University, Stockholm

Ralf Ekeboom, civil servant, Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health/member of the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials on Health and Social Affairs

Associate Professor Ann-Marie Ekengren, University of Gothenburg

Jan-Erik Enestam, Secretary General of the Nordic Council

Knud Enggaard, former President of the Nordic Council and Minister for Nordic co-operation, Denmark

Tobias Etzold, researcher, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Björg Eva Erlendsdóttir, Secretary to the Left-wing Socialist Green Group on the Nordic Council

Lene Frees, Director, special assignments, General Secretary's Office, Nordic Council of Ministers

Luciana Ghica, lecturer, University of Bucharest

Nina Græger, Head of Department and Senior Research Fellow, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo

Jytte Guteland, project manager at the think-tank Global Utmaning (Global Challenge), Stockholm

Professor Norbert Götz, Södertörn University, Stockholm

Peter Haldén, researcher, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University

Henry Hagemann, former Secretary General of the Danish Delegation to the Nordic Council

Svein Olav Hansen, freelance researcher

Heidi Haggren, postgraduate student, University of Helsinki  
Jonas Harvard, researcher, Södertörn University, Stockholm  
Professor Anke Hassel, Hertie School of Governance, Berlin  
Jan Hecker-Stampehl, researcher, Humboldt University, Berlin  
Markku Heikkilä, Director of the Science Communications Unit,  
Arctic Centre, University of Lapland  
Maimo Henriksson, Finland's Ambassador to Norway  
Dr Mary Hilson, Senior Lecturer in Scandinavian History, University  
College London  
Paul Holtom, researcher, Stockholm International Peace Research  
Institute  
Bertel Haarder, Chair of the Danish Delegation to the Nordic Council  
Larserik Häggman, adviser, Centre for Nordic Studies, University of  
Helsinki  
Professor Sakari Hänninen, National Institute for Health and Welfare,  
Helsinki  
Dagfinn Høybråten, former President of the Nordic Council  
Sverre Jervell, Senior Official, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,  
Oslo  
Jani Joenniemi, entrepreneur  
Pertti Joenniemi, researcher, Karelian Institute, University of Eastern  
Finland  
Peter Johansson, researcher, Institute for Futures Studies, Stockholm  
Professor Gudmundur Jonsson, University of Iceland  
Mindaugas Jurkunas, researcher, Vilnius University  
Professor Olli Kangas, Social Insurance Institution of Finland,  
Helsinki  
Professor Pauli Kettunen, University of Helsinki  
Anna Kharkina, PhD student, Södertörn University, Stockholm  
Ann-Christine Knudsen, lecturer, Aarhus University  
Eikka Kosonen, Head of the European Commission Representation in  
Finland  
Professor Peer Hull Kristensen, Copenhagen Business School

Peer Krumney, researcher, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Professor Jon Kvist, University of Southern Denmark

Simo Laakkonen, Senior Lecturer, University of Helsinki

Kai-Olaf Lang, researcher, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Professor Marko Lehti, Tampere Peace Research Institute, University of Tampere

Bo Lidegaard, Editor-in-Chief, Politiken, Copenhagen

Professor Kari Lilja, Aalto University, Helsinki

Johan Lindblad, Senior Adviser, Nordic Council of Ministers

Bo Lindroos, Head of Secretariat for Nordic Co-operation, Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Professor Raimo Lovio, Aalto University, Helsinki

Jani Marjanen, PhD student, Centre for Nordic Studies, University of Helsinki

Professor Pirjo Markkola, University of Jyväskylä

Carl Marklund, researcher, Stockholm University

Fredrik Melander, Senior Adviser, Department of knowledge and Welfare, Nordic Council of Ministers

Heikki Mikkeli, lecturer, University of Helsinki

Stefanie Mnich, researcher, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Silvia Modig, Vice-President of the Nordic Council

Professor Eli Moen, Norwegian Business School, Oslo

Mads Mordhorst, researcher, Copenhagen Business School

Professor Glenn Morgan, Cardiff University

Peter Munk Jensen, researcher, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen

Kjell Myhre-Jensen, Head of the Secretariat to the Norwegian Delegation to the Nordic Council, Oslo

Bjarne Mørk-Eidem, member of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Freedom of Movement Forum, former Minister for Nordic Co-operation, Norway

Håvard Nærum, journalist, Aftenposten

Antje Neumann, researcher, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Ere Nokkala, researcher, University of Helsinki

Nelli Nokkala, researcher, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Ole Norrback, Chair of Nordic Council of Ministers Freedom of Movement Forum, former Minister of Nordic Co-operation, Finland

Lisa Levin, researcher, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Hanna Ojanen, guest lecturer, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki

Kristín Ólafsdóttir, Secretary General, Confederation of Norden Associations

Professor Thorsten Borring Olesen, Aarhus University

Silja Bára Ómarsdóttir, lecturer, University of Iceland

Professor Klaus Petersen, University of Southern Denmark

Sten Palmgren, Senior Adviser for Legislative Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Helsinki

Marcus Rantala, State Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Helsinki

Matti Rantanen, Secretary to the Conservative Group on the Nordic Council

Pernille Rieker, researcher, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo

Pia Rosenqvist, Head of Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues, Helsinki

Frank Rossavik, journalist and commentator, Bergens Tidene

Oscar Rossi, author and critic, Stockholm

Professor Kari Saastamoinen, University of Helsinki

Kimmo Sasi, President of the Nordic Council  
Åsmund Arup Seip, researcher, Institute for Labour and Social  
Research, Oslo  
Odd Inge Skjævesland, journalist, Aftenposten  
Eva Smekal, former Head of Secretariat to the Swedish Delegation to  
the Nordic Council  
Professor Jussi Simpura, National Institute for Health and Welfare,  
Helsinki  
Peter Stadius, lecturer in Nordic studies, University of Helsinki  
Espen Stedje, General Secretary of the Norden Association, Norway  
Henrik Stenius, Research Director, Centre for Nordic Studies,  
University of Helsinki  
Thorvald Stoltenberg, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Norway  
Bo Stråth, visiting professor, Centre for Nordic Studies, University of  
Helsinki  
Alexander Stubb, Minister for Nordic Co-operation, Finland  
Carl-Einar Stålvant, lecturer, National Defence College, Stockholm  
Ilkka Suominen, former President of the Nordic Council  
Valgerður Sverrisdóttir, former Minister of Industry and Commerce,  
Iceland  
Olemic Thommesen, member of the Conservative Group on the Nordic  
Council  
Urve Tiidus MP, Estonia  
Teija Tiilikainen, Director, Finnish Institute of International Affairs,  
Helsinki  
Terhi Tikkala, Secretary to the Centre Group on the Nordic Council  
Professor Pia Letto-Vanamo, University of Helsinki  
Juhana Vartiainen, Director General, Government Institute for  
Economic Research, Helsinki  
Ylva Waldemarsson, lecturer, Södertörn University, Stockholm  
Jacob Westberg, lecturer, National Defence College, Stockholm  
Claes Wiklund, Editor-in-Chief, Nordisk Tidskrift  
Henry Wilén, General Secretary, the Norden Association, Finland

Thomas Wilhelmsson, Rector, University of Helsinki

Kari Winquist, Head of Administration, Nordic Innovation, Oslo

Patrick Zilliacus, former Secretary General of the Finnish Delegation  
to the Nordic Council

Johnny Åkerholm, former CEO of the Nordic Investment Bank

Rigmor Aasrud, Minister for Nordic Co-operation, Norway

Mirja Österberg, PhD student, Centre for Nordic Studies, University of  
Helsinki

Ann-Catrin Östman, lecturer, Åbo Akademi University



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Johan Strang

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*Nordic co-operation* is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

*Nordic co-operation* 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.

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#### **Nordic Council**

Ved Stranden 18

DK-1061 Copenhagen K

Phone (+45) 3396 0400

**[www.norden.org](http://www.norden.org)**



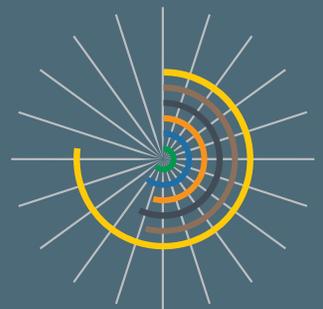
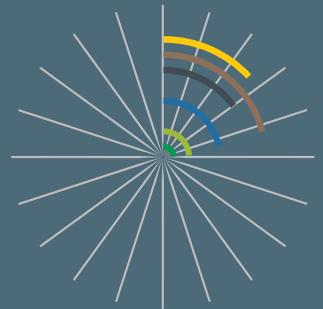
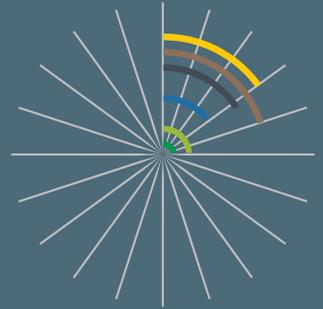
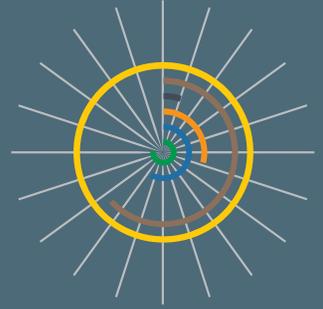
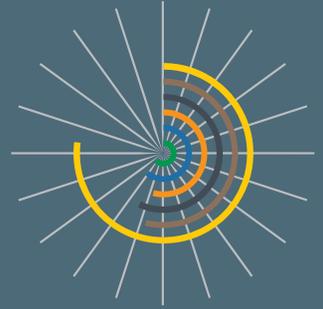
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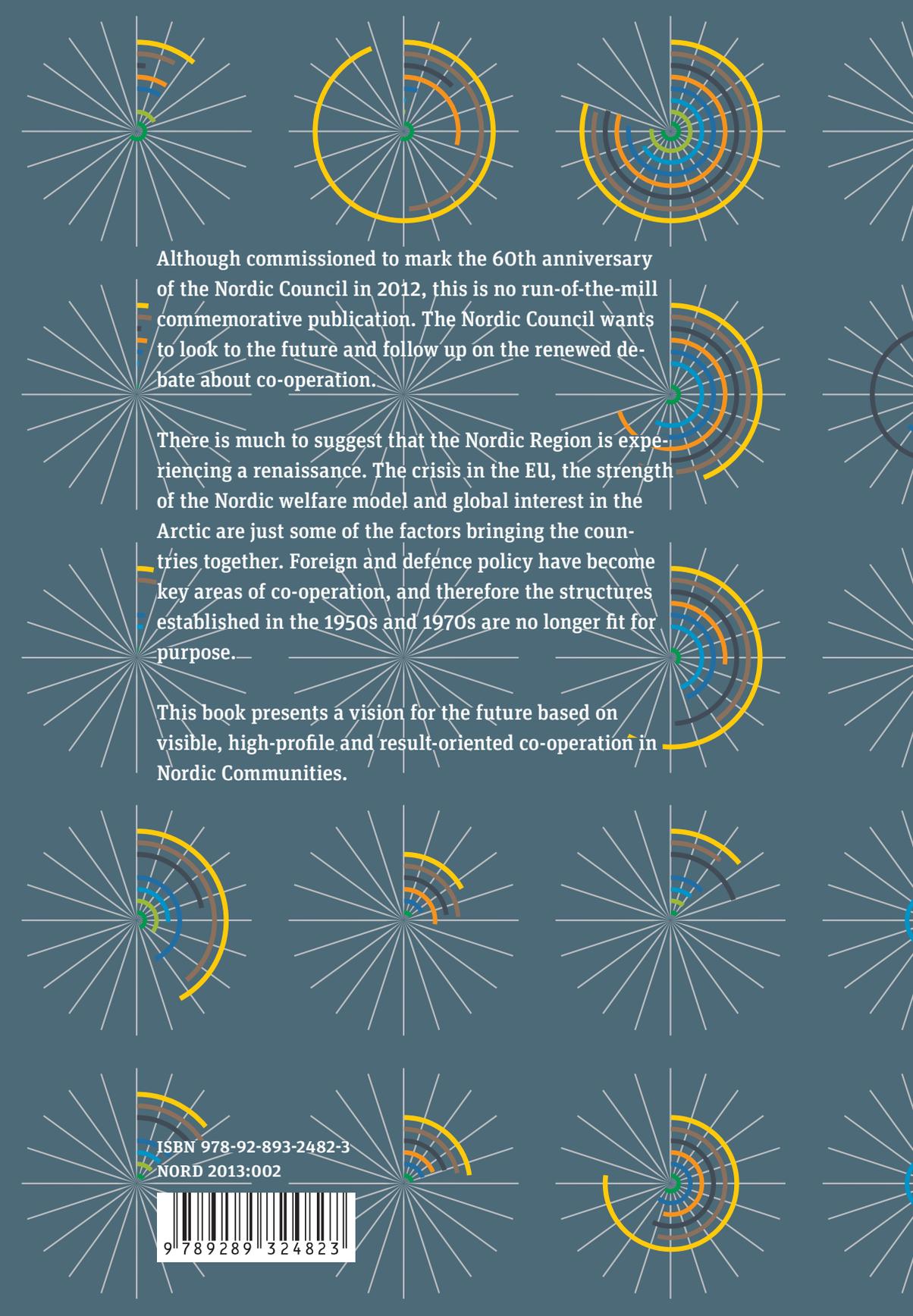
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DK-1061 Copenhagen K

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The Centre for Nordic Studies (CENS) was established at the University of Helsinki in 2002 to identify and study the specific factors that define a country as Nordic. CENS analyses Nordic history, society, politics and culture as areas of tension in which various forces pull in different directions. The Nordic countries are analysed from a comparative perspective, in which dialogue with non-Nordic researchers is essential. Via externally-funded projects (EU, NordForsk, Academy of Finland), CENS has secured a leading position in the fields of conceptual history, political culture, welfare, regionalism and regional co-operation. See [www.helsinki.fi/cens](http://www.helsinki.fi/cens)





Although commissioned to mark the 60th anniversary of the Nordic Council in 2012, this is no run-of-the-mill commemorative publication. The Nordic Council wants to look to the future and follow up on the renewed debate about co-operation.

There is much to suggest that the Nordic Region is experiencing a renaissance. The crisis in the EU, the strength of the Nordic welfare model and global interest in the Arctic are just some of the factors bringing the countries together. Foreign and defence policy have become key areas of co-operation, and therefore the structures established in the 1950s and 1970s are no longer fit for purpose.

This book presents a vision for the future based on visible, high-profile and result-oriented co-operation in Nordic Communities.

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