



Norden's high five to the neighbourhood

Assessment of the Nordic Council of Ministers offices
in the Baltic countries and Northwestern Russia

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The Finnish Institute of International Affairs

With assistance by *Annina Ala-Outinen*

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Nordic co-operation

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

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

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

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Personally, I am immensely grateful to Annina Ala-Outinen for her outstanding involvement in the project both in terms of practical assistance and the research work she has undertaken.

1. Preface: On the goals and the method

The purpose of this report is to give an overview of the current situation in, and the functioning of, the Offices of the Nordic Council of Ministers in the Baltic countries and in Northwestern Russia, namely St Petersburg and Kaliningrad. The evaluation generally follows the mandate, however, while taking into particular consideration the issues outside the mandate, namely those pertaining to the process of reform of the NCM's neighbourhood policies and its implications for the work of the Offices. The assessment also puts forward a particular view on the role of culture as regards visibility of the Offices. The conclusions of the report can be read as a summary.

When it comes to the division of labour, the section of the report on policy areas: cross-border cooperation; research and education; mobility, grants and exchange programmes; the NGO programme; and Culture was written in collaboration with Annina Ala-Outinen.

Our working method has been one of observing and listening to the people who are connected to the work of the Offices in numerous ways. All in all we interviewed about 190 persons.¹ Regrettably, due to scheduling problems not everyone whose viewpoints were relevant for the assessment was interviewed in person. We are all the more grateful that these people were kind enough to provide us with their helpful and insightful answers by email and phone. The report draws on these interviews and the views of the informants, but no direct quotations are included. In addition, some written material was used, namely the documents mentioned in the mandate and those that we have had access to during the process.

We apologize for any errors in the text that might have resulted due to time constraints.

Helsinki, 20 August 2007

Vadim Kononenko

¹ See the list of interviewees in Appendix 1.

2. The political background

2.1 Origins of the NCM Offices

Overall, the offices of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) in the Baltic countries and Northwestern Russia receive a very positive evaluation from their partners and other relevant parties which highlights the fact that the offices have been in place, in most cases, for over a decade and that they are regarded as an invaluable link between the neighbouring countries and the Nordic partners. Among the few critical voices, however, one can hear the opinion that the work of the offices would have been more efficient if better coordination had been facilitated both between the offices and the NCM Secretariat; and between the offices and the local “stakeholders” – organizations and individuals who are operating in the same policy areas as the NCM.

The most critical, if fairly marginal, evaluation came from those who view the offices as rather inadequate in the present situation and possibly even unnecessary in the future, particularly as far as their presence in the Baltic countries is concerned. This line of criticism was based on the view that the offices might have fulfilled their “initial” purpose of assisting the neighbours and are not needed in the new situation where the Baltic countries are full-fledged members of the EU. Therefore, for a proper assessment, it is important to take a look at how and why the offices were established and developed over time and how the goals and purposes of their work are defined.

The Offices of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) have been an integral element of the NCM’s cooperation with the neighbouring countries since 1991. The very practice of opening NCM information offices in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia indicated the significance of this region for the five Nordic states and a commitment to cooperate. Moreover, the decision to establish information offices was taken as the Baltic republics re-emerged as independent states after the period of Soviet rule. In fact, it was the Nordic parliamentarians who appeared to provide the impetus for opening external offices in the Baltic republics, with the result that the eventual establishment of the offices was interpreted by the people in the Baltic countries as symbolic recognition of their *de facto* independence even prior to the commencement of formal diplomatic relations between the Nordic countries and the Baltic republics.

Setting up the NCM Information Office in St Petersburg in 1995 was another significant step for the Nordic countries in terms of strengthening cooperation with the important neighbouring Russian Northwestern re-

gions. This cooperation was furthered in 2006 when the information office in Kaliningrad was established.

At present, the three offices in the Baltic countries and the two information offices in Northwest Russia represent the Nordic Council of Ministers and promote the many aspects of Nordic cooperation far beyond its homeland. In other words, the five external offices as well as several smaller info points can be seen as the “high five” of “Norden” – an important instrument with which the Nordic countries can reach out to their immediate neighbours.

2.2 Role and goals of the NCM Offices.

The objectives and goals of the work of the NCM offices would appear to have evolved over time. According to the majority of informants, the offices were originally meant to perform the functions of information centres, responding to a very keen and active interest towards the Nordic region on the part of the general public in the Baltic countries and in Northwestern Russia. Initially, the activities of the offices included maintaining libraries with material in Nordic languages as well as organising language courses and primarily cultural events. The overall aim was to disseminate information about all things “Nordic” for the new and diverse audiences. This was also the best way for the offices to establish themselves on foreign ground and introduce themselves to prospective partners. Since the offices were set up somewhat ahead of the actual strategies for cooperation, their objectives and responsibilities were defined in rather open terms. There was a general feeling of “stepping into the unknown” for the offices, the Nordic partners and their local counterparts. The offices sometimes had to give some basic support such as booking tickets and helping with visas and other practical arrangements. In all, this was largely attributable to the fact that the goals and activities of the offices were to a large extent organized on the “learn as you go” basis.

The role and goals of the offices were defined in more explicit terms when the first strategy for the neighbourhood policy, then called “policies for adjacent areas”, appeared in 2002.² The offices were requested to act as the implementer for the Council of Ministers’ cooperation projects in the adjacent areas, manage the exchange schemes and act as a node for the contact between the Nordic Council of Ministers, the local authorities and the Nordic ambassadors. It is worth noting that according to the guidelines prepared in 2002, the goal of providing information about the Nordic countries and Nordic cooperation and introducing the cultures of

² Framework programme 2003-2005 for the Nordic Council of Ministers Activities in the Adjacent Areas. Adopted by the Nordic Ministers of Cooperation 31.10 2002. NSK/MR-SAM 59/2002 REV.1

the neighbouring countries in the Nordic countries was placed under the more “political-administrative” tasks of handling relations with local authorities and managing exchange schemes. This shift in priorities became even more noticeable when the next set of guidelines was prepared in 2004.³

At present, the goals of the offices are defined as follows:

to constitute “the local contact point” for Nordic sectoral ministerial councils, their committees and working groups; develop networks with national authorities, NGOs and other national and international players in their respective countries;

serve as the Council of Ministers’ local observers, identifying trends and opportunities for joint Nordic-Baltic cooperation;

serve as exponents for all that is “Nordic”;

carry out the practical case handling, quality assurance of exchange programmes and other schemes.

In addition to the tasks specific to their locations, the offices are also requested to maintain the competence of each other’s operations and activities so as to build a common network.

Thus, it is apparent that the goals of the offices were evolving in line with the development of NCM policies for cooperation with neighbours. The Nordic-Baltic relations are said to have progressed from initial information exchange and assistance support towards partnership on an “equal basis”. This is reflected in the way the goals of the offices were reformulated so as to turn them into interlocutors for political cooperation between the Nordic actors and the neighbours.

Secondly, the formulation of objectives for the NCM policies and, by association, the NCM offices, have been affected by the developments in the neighbourhood. The shift from the assistance policy towards “equal partnership” and political cooperation has been mainly driven by the eventual accession of the Baltic countries to the European Union. In Russia, too, the political and economic developments of recent years have called for change in Nordic-Russian cooperation. In light of the rapid economic growth in the country and Russia’s more pronounced international status, the current objectives for cooperation seem to be defined in terms of “equal partnership”, albeit different and arguably more problematic than in the case of the Baltic-Nordic cooperation.

Thirdly, new goals and objectives for the offices appear due to their very presence in the region. Having been operating in their respective countries for more than a decade, the NCM offices acquired wide experience and a network of contacts. This invaluable asset is often put to use as, for example, in the case of the European Humanities University in

³ Guidelines for the Nordic Council of Ministers’ cooperation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 2006-2008. NSK 70/2004; Guidelines for the Nordic Council of Ministers’ cooperation with North-west Russia 2006-2008. NSK 69/2004

Vilnius, where the NCM office in Lithuania acts as a coordinator and local contact point.

Therefore, one can conclude that there is no fixed set of goals or one final “existential purpose” for the offices. As a working instrument, their profile changes reflect the development of NCM neighbourhood policies as well as the changing environment in which they are located. It has to be noted, however, that the offices are not passive agents in their environment, as they were created to further the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, which itself strives for a more proactive policy and a visible role in the region. It is thus important for the assessment to examine the offices in the institutional context, including their interaction with other actors involved in regional cooperation.

3. The institutional context

The place of the NCM Offices among the institutions of Nordic cooperation

Nordic cooperation is a very complex process with national, inter-governmental levels and various public agencies all involved, and collectively comprising the so-called “Nordic family”. Cooperation with the neighbours has permeated almost every Nordic organization. However, leaving the many aspects of decision-making and interaction between various Nordic actors outside the scope of this evaluation, it is important to focus on the interaction of the NCM regional offices with their most immediate and relevant Nordic counterparts.

Institutionally, the NCM offices are part of the NCM Secretariat in Copenhagen, with a status which corresponds to that of the Secretariat’s department. The Secretariat itself is rather extensive, comprising six large departments. The work of the offices is coordinated by two advisors, one responsible for Russia and the cooperation in the Barents region, the other for the Baltic countries and international cooperation in general. The latter, who holds the position of Senior Advisor, is a member of the Secretary General’s cabinet and assists him in matters that concern the international work of the NCM. The office directors also have direct access to the Secretary General, even though in most cases the international coordinators are normally involved. There is also a more “horizontal” type of interaction between the offices and other departments that are responsible for cooperation in overlapping sectors of cooperation.

By and large, organising interaction between the offices and the Secretariat does not seem to have been an easy task from the beginning. The NCM was not constructed with the aim of having regional offices outside the Nordic region and the amount of responsibility and the actual workload have not decreased since the opening of the offices in the 1990s. Various attempts were made to improve the interaction between the offices and the headquarters. In 2003-2004 the status of the offices within the Secretariat was highlighted so as to avoid the impression that they are somehow external in relation to the organization. Also, the communication between the offices and the Secretary General has increased significantly with regular visits and almost daily exchange of information by phone. The proliferation of electronic channels also means that a great deal of communication is conducted by email.

Besides the Secretariat, there are other Nordic organizations that the Offices interact with such as NEFCO, NOPUS, NHV and NORD-

FORSK.⁴ Hence the offices are often approached with home-grown initiatives to find a relevant partner or assist in organising a meeting. No formal procedures for interaction between the offices and other Nordic institutions exist. It is often said to be taking place according to a general “Nordic way”: informal, “laid-back” cooperation with little hierarchy involved. Still, communication problems do occur. Occasionally, it has been said, the offices are not informed about visits that take place in their countries including visits paid by Secretariat staff.

The parliamentary wing of Nordic cooperation, the Nordic Council, is less involved in the activities of the offices, compared to the situation when cooperation began in the early 1990s. Having advocated the idea of setting up the offices, Nordic parliamentarians have left it to the NCM to organize practical cooperation with the neighbours. The offices are nonetheless seen as an important resource by the members of the Nordic Council, particularly as many of them were personally involved in their activities at the early stage. The offices are normally paid “courtesy visits” by the Nordic parliamentarians when on official visits to their countries. Interaction seems to be more active on specific issues of political significance. For example, the Saint Petersburg office has assisted in the emerging cooperation between the Nordic Council and the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (headquartered in Saint Petersburg) by finding relevant partners and organising meetings. Also, on the initiative of a Norwegian member of parliament, there has been a discussion to set up a meeting between the Nordic parliamentarians and their counterparts from Belarus with the help of one of the Baltic offices.

In their respective countries, the NCM offices encounter various Nordic actors too, the most important of which are clearly the embassies of the Nordic countries. Compared with Nordic embassies, the NCM offices have some distinct characteristics. As representatives of an intergovernmental organization, the NCM offices do not need to follow the perspective of a certain state. On the contrary, their presence in the region on a par with the diplomatic missions signifies that the common values and objectives of the “Norden” are being carried out in the neighbourhood.⁵ In some way, through their activity, the NCM offices nurture cooperation both within the five Nordic countries and between the Nordics and their neighbours. It is commonly held that the activities of the offices (as a part of larger cooperation programmes of the NCM) are complementary to the bilateral programmes of individual Nordic countries. Furthermore, as far as the financial side is concerned, the offices enjoy the particular advan-

⁴ These acronyms stand for Nordic Environment Finance Corporation, Nordic Education Programme for Social Service Development, Nordic School of Public Health and Nordic Research Board, respectively. The latter is of particular interest as there is a joint representative of the national research councils from the three Baltic countries on its Board with the observer status.

⁵ Kaliningrad is particularly pertinent here in the sense that, with the exception of Sweden and Denmark, the Nordic countries do not have their representative with diplomatic credentials permanently stationed in the oblast.

tage of having larger budgets for various activities than the Nordic embassies. In recent years, all the Nordic countries have slashed their bilateral programmes for cooperation with neighbours. Also, in many cases, the Nordic embassies are small in size and far less equipped to organize cultural events than the offices.⁶ There is also another important advantage in that the embassies would not be able to promote cooperation between Baltic countries. This is something that the NCM has been doing by bringing together participants from all the Baltic countries.

By and large, the cooperation with the embassies and consulates general seems to be rather declaratory: in the common view, the embassies are said “to know that the NCM offices exist” but in practice the organizations do not meet very often. One of the reasons for this might be that the embassies are clearly less “Nordic” than the NCM offices. They have different priorities and members’ heads of missions are often only vaguely familiar with the Nordic issues having been working in the countries far outside the region previously. The attitude towards the offices is thus very pragmatic; they are noticed only if their role is seen as instrumental and beneficial for the embassies. At the same time, the difference in profile and the functioning of the offices and the embassies does provide in some cases for mutually useful synergy. For example, the Finnish embassy in Lithuania prefers to consult the NCM office with regard to developments with the European Humanities University (including matters concerning funding and the Finnish contribution), rather than requesting this information directly from the University. In some way the embassies “rely” on the offices particularly when it comes to financing bigger events. However, the problem of combining the national and the “Nordic” objectives, which in practice means getting more than one embassy involved, becomes pertinent once again.

Finally, Nordic cultural institutes in the Baltic countries and North-west Russia constitute a specific reference group for the NCM offices.⁷ The offices seem to cooperate with the cultural institutes to a lesser degree than in the early 1990s when both had equally little experience in the region and were mainly responding to a very profound interest vis-à-vis the Nordic countries. As the channels for contact have multiplied as well as the means and sources of information, the cultural institutes and the NCM offices alike appear to be pursuing similar goals as far as cultural activities are concerned. Both are interested not in merely displaying and distributing information but rather in inventing new projects and attracting the public with new cultural initiatives. Yet there is also an important aspect in which the offices and the cultural institutes of the Nordic countries differ. Similar to the embassies, the cultural institutes represent their

⁶ Not every embassy or consulate employs a cultural officer. Also, most of the embassies tend to lay more emphasis on trade and economic relations, in addition to purely diplomatic tasks.

⁷ Today there are Finnish and Danish cultural institutes in St Petersburg, Riga and Tallinn. The cultural institutes were established in the early 1990s and together with the NCM offices they were the pioneers in the then emerging Nordic-Baltic cooperation.

respective countries and cooperate with other institutions if they perceive this as being beneficial for their country. By and large, interaction has decreased partly because the overall interest has levelled off, and partly because the offices were given new functions, a move which may have made traditional cultural events seem less of a priority.

The NCM Offices and regional organizations

The Nordic Council of Ministers is not the only international actor with presence in the region. Other organizations include the Arctic and Euro-Barents Councils, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Baltic Assembly, and the European Union. The organizations differ in membership, structure, and policy priorities. The NCM has developed particularly strong ties with the EU by largely adopting the Union's Northern Dimension as a reference point for its neighbourhood policies. There is a common interest to work more closely with the EU as far as the activities in the neighbourhood are concerned: for those countries that are EU members this seems a natural priority, for Norway and Iceland cooperation with neighbours is a channel for increasing their visibility in the EU as these countries are not members. There are different views, however, on what course of action should be taken. Finland, for example, sees the need to steer Nordic cooperation even closer towards the EU's guidelines, a position that can be explained by Finland being the founder of the Northern Dimension.⁸ Other Nordic countries may have a vision that differentiates between the EU's activities and Nordic policies for fear that the latter might be subsumed under the broader EU-centred rubric. In all, it seems that the ND is merely used as a communicational device to link together multiple partners; it is easy to use one concept instead of several acronyms. When it comes to its content, it is "supplied" through a variety of sources, not uncommonly through Nordic financial instruments such as the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) or the Nordic Project Fund (NOPEF). It is worth noting that the ND does not have a secretariat of its own and many of its projects in the regions are organized with the help of local partners, such as the NCM offices.

The European Commission, however, does have its representations in all Baltic countries.⁹ Prior to accession, the representations had different functions, assisting the applicant countries in preparations for accession. In some respects, the EU offices have undergone a similar process to the NCM offices following the change in EU-Baltic relations from assistance policies to equal cooperation due to Baltic accession to the EU.

⁸ Norden 2007: Nordic region of opportunity – close to you. Programme for the Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2007.

⁹ In Russia, the Commission has the only official representation in Moscow and several contact points throughout the country (including Kaliningrad), often referred to as "Tacis offices" that supervise the EU-sponsored projects but do not represent the EU as such.

The CBSS is another organization that is frequently mentioned as a strategic partner for the NCM. The CBSS is noted for having a very wide pan-regional membership of Baltic and Nordic countries together with Russia, Poland, and Germany. Ukraine and the US are two of the countries that have observer status in this organization. The most visible link between the CBSS and the NCM has been the Baltic Euroregional Network (BEN), a project that promotes cooperation between border regions in the Baltic countries and Northwestern Russia, financed in part by the European Commission, the NCM and the CBSS member countries.

The problems of coordination and response

It goes without saying that there is a large array of “stakeholders” operating in the neighbourhood with similar instruments and a common underlying vision to strengthen regional cooperation between states, societies and individuals. No single organization, however, is regarded as a coordinator or is willing to accept a fellow organization as one, therefore a certain degree of overlap is probably an inevitable part of the process of cooperation. In some way, one could assume that coordination does emerge on a case to case basis without any formal transfer of power or decision-making rights. In fact, as the examples of large jointly financed and organized projects such as the Baltic Euroregional Network or the European Humanities University show, the NCM is involved *ipso facto* in some sort of coordination work that requires additional efforts and resources. Since the NCM is equipped with the regional offices, a “luxury” that other organizations cannot afford for financial or other reasons, a great deal of the practical coordination is left to the NCM offices.

The capacities for coordination possessed by the NCM offices are limited. The offices are not entitled to act as formal coordinators as their mandate is restricted to representation of the NCM. Indeed, the question of coordination could perhaps best be characterized as one of response. Indeed, the offices respond to a variety of actors, not only to the home-grown initiatives from the Nordic side but also to the input that comes from other regional organizations, and a plethora of actors, the most relevant of whom were described above.

Hence, one could consider making improvements in the offices' capacity to respond to both internal and external demands. It is important to note that this response should not be merely reactive. For example, in the case of the interaction with the Nordic embassies, the offices could take on the role of nodal points in discussing relevant issues and proposing projects and activities.

New institutions are also appearing in the Nordic system, which raises the question of coordination and response. A case in point is the newly organized Culture Contact North, located in Suomenlinna (Helsinki). This new institution is charged with providing expertise in the field of

culture and also participating in the exchange and mobility programmes of the NCM as an expert and an administrator. It is not clear how the offices are going to coordinate their work with the newcomer and how their tasks and functions will be divided.

4. The NCM Offices

4.1 General observations

It has to be pointed out that the NCM offices are located in a geographically close yet very diverse environment. Despite the usual perception of the Baltic countries as a group, the three countries differ significantly in their domestic economic, social and political developments. Their parallel “race” for EU membership and a simultaneous accession in 2004 has somewhat reinforced the image of the Baltic countries as a group but the new Baltic EU members seem to differ a great deal in their social and economic development. Thus, by operating in this diverse environment, the three “Baltic offices” have developed specific profiles.

In Russia, the two information offices are unique in their own terms. They were established at different times (the IO in St Petersburg in 1995 and the IO in Kaliningrad in 2006) and with different geographical reaches. The Saint Petersburg IO covers the city of Saint Petersburg and Russia’s Northwestern regions, while the scope of activities of the IO in Kaliningrad is limited by the city of Kaliningrad and the surrounding Kaliningrad oblast.¹⁰

Furthermore, the way the offices are named reflects their differences: the Baltic information offices were simply renamed NCM Offices in 2005-2006 while the ones in St Petersburg and Kaliningrad kept the name Information Office. Sometimes they are simply referred to as “office” or “Norden”, although the latter is confusing as there is a non-profit organization that bears that name – Association “Norden”. There is similar confusion with the Info Points that, in some cases, are referred to as “contact centres”.

In all, it may seem that there is no one way to assess all five offices according to a set of fixed criteria. At the same time, one cannot regard the offices as completely unique since they have common features and are elements of NCM policies. The five offices are relatively small in size having, on average, up to 10 persons employed. The Info Points are mainly “one person” offices. In terms of funding, the NCM offices receive

¹⁰ The geographical scope of the NCM’s cooperation with Northwestern Russia seems slightly unclear. According to the Guidelines for the Nordic Council of Ministers’ cooperation with Northwest Russia 2006-2008, cooperation will primarily cover those parts of Northwest Russia with a natural border with either a Nordic or Baltic country thus covering Murmansk oblast, Republic of Karelia, Leningrad oblast, Pskov oblast, St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad. At the same time, the existence of an Info-Point in Arkhangelsk suggests that this region is included in cooperation as well even though it does not fall into the criteria of having a direct border with the Nordic or Baltic countries.

around 17.7 MDKK annually from the NCM.¹¹ The last five years have been a time of major change for the offices due to a process of changing policies for the neighbourhood which is still underway in the organization.

4.2 Tallinn

The NCM Tallinn Office is centrally located in Tallinn's Old Town in a medieval building. The premises are pleasant and spacious, although the rent is considered rather high. For this reason, the office had to give up a larger room used for events and seminars and at present has to rent space elsewhere if a major event is held. This is not seen as a drawback, however, as the events and receptions organized by the office are normally held somewhere in town in any case. At present, there are six persons working in the office.

Given its appearance and the scope of activities, it seems that the office is more "Nordic" than the others, perhaps due to the proximity of Estonia and the traditionally strong ties with Finland and Sweden. The working languages in the office are Estonian and Swedish. The members of staff are predominantly female and are very experienced and dedicated to their work.

The Tallinn office seems to be particularly strong on culture. The range of cultural events includes The Nordic Culture Festival, the Nordic Poetry Festival and the Nordic Drama Days. The Nordic Poetry Festival in particular has brought together participants from all over the Baltic region including Germany. Another successful "product" of the office are the Nordic forums: a series of seminars dedicated to topical issues of interest to both Estonians and Nordics.

Thanks to its Branch Office in Tartu, which the Tallinn office has charged with the task of managing the projects in the field of education and exchange (also because the Ministry of Education is located there), Estonia's eastern regions were also embraced by NCM programmes of cooperation.

One of the issues that deserves greater attention is information work and interaction with other organizations. Despite the fact that Estonia is a relatively small country, it seems that the NCM office is not particularly well known to the European Commission Office in Tallinn. Establishing a more effective information-sharing with the EU office would help to avoid the risk of organising overlapping events. For example, both offices organised a seminar on innovation in 2007. If, during the planning process, the information exchange had been more active, there could have

¹¹ The budget also highlights the difference between the offices. According to the budget plan for the year 2008, the two information offices in Russia will receive almost as much funding (8.2 MDKK) as the three offices in the Baltic countries (9.5 MDKK).

been a possibility of cooperation in preparing the seminars or finding the dates that would have best suited both organisations. Also, there could be more activity in cooperating with the other offices, especially the IO in Saint Petersburg.

4.3 Riga

The NCM office in Riga gives the impression of being a very proactive actor in terms of building contacts with non-governmental organizations, as well as in the field of culture. There are nine people employed including the director. The office publishes its own electronic newsletter in Latvian and English and there are plans to organize a series of seminars or roundtables for those members of the local audience who are interested in Nordic and international issues. A detail which is interesting to note is that the political elite in Latvia has a significant contingent of Latvians who were born to the families of Latvian emigrants to the US or Canada after the Soviet invasion. The expatriates thus add a particular "Western" flavour to Latvian political life and it has its implications for Nordic actors. It was reported that a certain value gap might have been in place (as can be the case in other Baltic countries and in Russia) which the Nordic partners have to bridge in order to promote cooperation. At the same time, the office received a very positive evaluation from the participants of the exchange programmes and other partners.

The general view is that more cooperation with the Nordic embassies would be welcomed. The problem of communication was mentioned repeatedly which points to the fact that, for certain audiences, the image of the office is somewhat unclear. There is a great willingness to cooperate but the actual cooperation work seems to be rather randomly organized. The general wish on the part of the embassies was that information exchange should be enhanced and the planning of events should be carried out well in advance.

As far as the possible priorities in Latvia are concerned, the general view is that a lot needs to be done in that republic, as the economic disparity between Riga and the rest of the country is still extensive. Thus, in addition to large-scale projects a plethora of small-scale projects directed at the regions outside the capital was considered important.

As a sign of acknowledgment but also of growing competition in the field of culture, the "French Spring" project organized by the French Cultural Institute was mentioned. An interesting idea that is worth exploring was brought up, namely to launch a TV series about the Nordic region in close collaboration with the office. The office itself with its spacious premises in the heart of Riga already hosts photo exhibitions, book launches and other events.

4.4 Vilnius

The NCM office in Vilnius is the farthest of the Baltic offices from the Nordic region.

EU accession boosted Lithuania's self-esteem, and the country currently sees itself as a regional leader in relations with the EU's neighbours in the East, particularly Belarus. At the same time, the Nordic countries have taken an active interest in issues emerging from the EU's external relations with the East. Belarus thus seems to be the area of common interest and a new issue on the Nordic-Baltic agenda.

The work of the NCM office in Vilnius was greatly affected by this change when the office took on the role of a local coordinator for the European Humanities University (EHU), a Belorussian university which was transferred to Lithuania on the invitation of the Lithuanian authorities and with the involvement of the EU. In 2006 an agreement was concluded between the EHU and the NCM to launch an extensive project in support of the EHU. The project provides €2.78 million worth of funding for the education of 350 Belarus students over three years within the framework of eleven university programmes; six Master degree programmes and five Bachelor degree programmes. The EU contributes 80% of the funding while the NCM, Sweden and Finland are jointly responsible for the remaining 20%.¹²

The involvement with the EHU puts the NCM on a different political plane from the one it occupied before. For example, the director of the office has access to high officials in the Lithuanian MFA, the Prime Minister's Office and the European Commission.

At the same time, being in charge of such a major project has been a drain on the resources of the Vilnius office. Indeed, with its small staff of nine people, the office has achieved a lot. The EHU requires constant attention as there are practical problems that require a quick response. For example, sometimes the students are stopped at the border by Belorussian authorities. The future of the university is somewhat uncertain as being a university in exile cannot be a permanent solution. Given that the university is not likely to return to its home country as it would require a change in the political situation in Belarus, the time could be ripe to think of a long-term solution for the EHU. This also calls into question the future of the Nordic support and the future activities at the Vilnius office. At the moment it seems that its resources are on the verge of being overstretched: apart from the EHU, the office has been a leading partner in the Baltic Euroregions Network (BEN), a major project on cross-border cooperation. This comes on top of the projects designed for Lithuania exclusively.

¹² The NCM and the European Commission have also established the Higher Education for Belorussian Youth Programme which enables students from Belarus to spend time as exchange students at Ukrainian universities. The programme is administered from Copenhagen.

It was reported that it is easy to represent “Norden” in Lithuania. The Nordic countries are seen as friends but they are also far away so not expected to be greatly involved. At the same time the NCM is also regarded as a very transparent organization, and one which is easy to work with compared to other international organizations.

4.5 St. Petersburg

The Information Office in St Petersburg has relocated recently and moved into a business centre where some Scandinavian companies are also located, next to the premises of the Swedish consulate general. The office premises are somewhat more business-like than the previous ones, thus reflecting the shift in activity from an open information centre to an office that deals with concrete programmes and contacting partners. The IO in St Petersburg is clearly the largest of all NCM office in the neighbouring countries, with fifteen members of staff and several interns from the Nordic countries who are received in a regular basis.

A more substantial problem with the office, however, currently concerns its status. The problem occurred for different coinciding reasons. Since its inception, the office has been in contact primarily with the authorities in St Petersburg. Unlike the Baltic offices, the Saint Petersburg office did not receive the status of a diplomatic mission, the director of the office ordinarily being accredited as a member of staff of one of the Nordic consulates general in Saint Petersburg.

When the preparations for the opening of the IO in Kaliningrad were underway, it did not receive diplomatic status either (trying to acquire diplomatic status would have entailed postponing the opening of the office indefinitely), but this happened to coincide with the status of the office in St Petersburg being called into question. Another factor that affected the process was that the Saint Petersburg office had relied on good personal connections in the representation of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in St Petersburg and when the head of representation changed, the office had to re-introduce itself to the new representative. As if this was not enough to make the existence of the office problematic, new legislation concerning foreigners working in Russia was put in place, which required special registration and higher fees for foreigners. Also, the former practice of having the IO director accredited to a Nordic consulate general was discontinued.¹³

The situation was left hanging in the balance during the autumn of 2006 and most of the spring of 2007, with the result that the office was treated as a Russian NGO and the newly appointed director was not able to work permanently in St Petersburg for the corresponding length of

¹³ According to the current Russian legislation, a person accredited to a diplomatic mission should perform his or her tasks on the premises of the mission only and not elsewhere.

time. The director had to visit Russia on a tourist visa! This also explains why there were no trainees from the Nordic countries working in the St. Petersburg IO.

Due for the most part to its extremely experienced and knowledgeable personnel, the St Petersburg information office manages to carry a very heavy workload while operating in a generally unpredictable environment. It seems that organising events and nurturing connections with the authorities has become the area where most of the effort is concentrated. Nordic Food was mentioned as one of the examples of such work. Additionally, the IO is working on finding potential partners in areas of mutual interest.

Among the local authorities, the IO office has generally received a very positive evaluation. Yet, the image of the office and the NCM varies a great deal depending on the level. It was particularly noticeable in Russia, where due to the scope of work and the complexity in the country, the office has to operate on many different levels: the level of the St Petersburg City administration is already rather high (comparable perhaps to the government of a small country), and there is also the Federal District level to consider.¹⁴

A detail worth pointing out is that there is no official representation of the EU in St Petersburg. There used to be a "branch office" of the European Commission Delegation in Moscow that dealt primarily with the TACIS programmes, but this was closed down in 2005. The IO is thus in the position of being a working office of one of the few international actors in the Northwest Russia, a position of privilege but, as the current wrangles over status demonstrate, not without its problems.

The St Petersburg IO has three smaller info points in Murmansk, Arkhangelsk and Petrozavodsk. The role of the info points is to be local representatives for the St Petersburg IO. Indeed, the area in which the NCM policies are directed is vast and the resources of just one Information Office in St Petersburg (the IO in Kaliningrad is focused primarily on the oblast) are clearly insufficient. For example, the info point in Petrozavodsk is acquiring a more specific profile due to its role in the new project on cross-border cooperation. The level of awareness about the NCM in general and the possibilities that cooperation raises is still relatively low in the regions. In this respect the work of the info points is paramount. It might be an idea to "de-centralise" the IO and delegate more tasks to the IP, but in this regard more investments in the work of the IP would be required.

¹⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the Russian political developments, see Kononenko V. Changing centre-periphery relations in Northwestern Russia in Ojanen H. (2004) "Small but Smart" Assessment of the NCM's Policies for the Adjacent Areas. http://www.norden.org/ruweb/docs/08_assesment.pdf

4.6 Kaliningrad

The Information Office in Kaliningrad is the latest addition to the family of NCM offices. The IO has small but well-organized premises in the city centre, within reach of the city administration and other establishments. Apart from the director, the office employs three assistants and a driver. The assistants are rather young but very motivated. At the same time, the present director, a Dane with several years experience of working in Russia, has managed to build a very good personal network. The image of the office in the region, and of the NCM in general, is still underdeveloped and somewhat vague. Therefore, a lot of work has to be done to increase its visibility, something that the other offices had to concentrate on in the early stages.

Introducing the IO in Kaliningrad is arguably a much more difficult task than it was in the Baltic countries and in Saint Petersburg. The Baltic offices were warmly welcomed in their new locations and their presence had not only practical but also symbolic significance. The Saint Petersburg IO was opened when the issue of cooperation with the neighbours was very new and at the top of the agenda for the city leaders. It took several years to open the IO in Kaliningrad because of bureaucratic hurdles. Also, unlike more North European-oriented Saint Petersburg, the Kaliningrad oblast has established links with the neighbours: Germany, Poland and Lithuania. At present, there is also a lot of investment money being injected into the region's economy from the federal centre. All this makes the IO's efforts to generate interest in the NCM and its programmes quite challenging.

Since it opened in September 2006, the IO has organized a major "get together" conference entitled "Social inclusion of children with disabilities", which has received attention in the local media. Yet, the office's information work still has a long way to go. For example, the IO website should be developed and launched as soon as possible.

It seems that the IO in Kaliningrad is particularly keen on major plans such as the ongoing cooperation with the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) and the general interest towards the issues of energy and sustainability and the EU's Northern Dimension.¹⁵ While such ambitious projects may lead to a greater profile for the NCM in the region, the problem may be that the work of the IO might not get acknowledged as much as it should. Since the EU and its flagship programmes, including the Northern Dimension, are better-known in the region, one could recommend fostering contact with the local EU Tacis office in order to disseminate information about each other's activities and to prevent events from overlapping, for example. Also, as the IO is cooperating closely with Nordic organizations and regional organizations (NEFCO,

¹⁵<http://www.nordicenergy.net/download.cfm?file=614851DDF5058CF22DF6-3D3344AD89919CF>

BASREC), better coordination work is needed in order to ensure that the contribution of the IO (and the NCM) is duly acknowledged.

5. Observations on selected policy sectors (together with Annina Ala-Outinen)

5.1 General observations

The NCM's mobility programmes and activities in the neighbourhood are currently focused on the five large issue areas of cooperation, namely education and research, social and health issues, NGO networking, cross-border cooperation and culture. The issues that are considered of particular "Nordic value" such as gender equality, grassroots democracy, transparency and sustainability are incorporated into these programmes.

In previous years, the NCM neighbourhood policies were targeted at the societies of the respective countries with the overall aim of facilitating civil society and creating professional, educational and cultural networks within and between the Baltic countries, Russia and the Nordic countries. Currently, the rationale for the cooperation with the Baltic countries and, to a degree, with Russia, is to make a gradual transition from the policies of assistance towards "equal partnership".¹⁶

It is worth pointing out, however, that the attitudes towards this new underlying model of thinking differ significantly in the Baltic countries and in Northwestern Russia. In the Baltic countries, the general view was that although equal partnership is an obvious goal there might still be a long way to go, in terms of organising the common decision-making, coordination and selection process, as well as evaluating the projects. The instruments and mechanisms for "equal cooperation" are still very nascent and many would find it premature to put them into practice within the next couple of years. In St Petersburg and Kaliningrad the principle of mutual benefit and "equality" in the future projects seems to be regarded as a necessary prerequisite, in order to underline the fact that the time when Russia was in need of Western aid is a thing of the past. If the Baltic approach can be considered more pragmatic, the Russian attitude is more political: "equal cooperation" is seen as a value in itself to underline Russia's position as a strong actor.

In all, the NCM's policies for the neighbourhood seem to be at a difficult stage of implementing this new underlying concept of "equal partnership". The response of the Baltic and Russian counterparts differs,

¹⁶ See Nordic Council of Ministers Russia Programme, <http://www.norden.org/pub/miljo/naer-sk/US2005452.pdf>

however more often than not it boils down to a “wait and see” attitude. This puts the NCM offices in a difficult situation, as interlocutors there are responsible for the contact with local parties that generally request more clarity and certainty from their Nordic partners. At the same time, the offices are not always in a position to provide that clarity as they themselves are often on the receiving end of the policy-making. In the following sections, the situation in every policy sector is examined in greater detail, focusing on the implications for the offices.

5.2 Education and Research

Education has always been an important element in the Nordic cooperation. By applying a wider geographical scope and involving neighbours, co-operation in education, research and innovation are seen to be the driving forces in sustaining the wider Baltic and Northern European region as internationally competitive, dynamic and attractive.

One of the aims of mobility programmes is to help in building functional structures and international links between the public and private sectors in the neighbouring countries by offering the professionals working in the field of public administration, state institutions and business an opportunity to visit and work in the Nordic countries. Another crucial goal is to promote mobility in the field of research and higher education between universities, university colleges and research institutes in the Nordic and Baltic countries and Northwestern Russia. Mobility and exchange is the widest area of cooperation and it comprises several programmes targeted at various educational levels and geographical areas. The most significant of these programs are Nordplus and Nordplus Neighbour.¹⁷

The offices have been acting as programme coordinators and information providers. The offices do not look for host partners for programme participants, but act only as evaluators of the potential grant recipients. Information about the programmes was regarded as well-presented and sufficient for the target audience. The offices were instrumental in providing help at every step of the application process.

Information about the mobility programmes is available on the net and is published in the newspapers. Mailing lists are also used and some local associations are in the habit of passing information on. The offices also arrange information seminars for potential programme participants. The programme that could benefit from more information activity is Nord-ProLink. The main reason for this is that the programme has a wider target group and the information is not distributed among prospective applicants in the same way as in the other mobility programmes. In general,

¹⁷ For details concerning the mobility and exchange programmes
<http://siu.no/en/>

applying for and using the grants was regarded as an easy process and difficulties were only encountered when it came to finding a host partner in the Nordic countries.

2007 is a year of transition as the new Nordplus programme is under preparation. The instruments of cooperation are organized to reflect the growing responsibility of Baltic and Russian ministries as they will be the main coordinators of the actual cooperation. Relations with Ministries of Education are good in all Baltic countries. Cooperation of this kind is particularly smooth in Latvia where the representatives of the ministry are actively involved in the planning process of the new Nordplus. In other countries the ministries are not so well aware of their new responsibilities and are hoping for more dialogue. The representatives of state administration all agreed that contacting the local offices has been easy and functional, as they understand the local situation and are open to ideas that could not be passed on directly and with such ease to the NCM's secretariat in Copenhagen.

The universities are clearly the most active participants in, and beneficiaries of, cooperation on education and the offices have good contacts with at least the main universities in the countries they are located in. In particular, the Tartu information point has close contacts with the University of Tartu and the Vilnius office is co-operating closely with the Centre of Scandinavian Studies of the University of Vilnius. The representatives of the universities and centres of learning feel that the level of co-operation with the Nordic countries and with the offices has changed a great deal since the 1990s when support from the offices had an enormous impact on the development of education. The offices' international contacts were essential and Nordic lecturers were really needed to get the educational programmes working. Now after a decade of building educational systems, the national priorities in the Baltic countries have also changed as far as international cooperation is concerned. The priority areas for co-operation are currently the eastern neighbours Russia, Ukraine and Moldova, while the Baltic countries are supposed to be acting as experts in those projects. Universities are not aware of what is going to happen after the final year of Nordplus and advance information about the new directions of cooperation and new responsibilities was something that was wished for.

The mobility programmes are also changing their function from one of supporting individuals to getting groups and organizations involved. The 30% co-financing is now required, which could be one reason for the decrease in interest. The idea behind these changes is to make mobility more planned and competent in order to serve mutual networking needs.

What the NCM has offered with its grants is an opportunity – and in many cases the only opportunity – for the Baltic partners to acquire special know-how and to make personal contacts with Nordic partners. In practice, this has been realized through and by the NCM offices. As many

participants in the NordProLink programme stated, they faced enormous difficulties in finding a host company, hence the support from the offices, for example in the form of a letter of recommendation for the potential employee, was gratefully acknowledged. The civil servants exchange programme coordinated by the offices is still considered to be of great benefit in Russia and in the Baltic countries. The old rigid practices of administration and management are still in use in the Baltic countries in many places and therefore just the chance of seeing another kind of system or organizational structure can be an eye-opening experience for many. The St Petersburg information office has already arranged three experimental group visits; for graduates from the Presidential Programme, civil servants working with social issues, and representatives of municipality administration as “test cases” for the future mobility programmes.

Implications for the offices

The branch of co-operation in exchange that is still underdeveloped is research. In all interviews the general consensus was that the links between Baltic and Nordic countries in the field of research are still weak. There is clearly a need and a will to develop joint research and researchers' exchange programmes in the Baltic Sea region. One important step in that direction is the membership of the Baltic countries as observers in the Board of NordForsk – the funding and coordination body on Nordic research policy. Building research networks is, of course, not something the offices can do, but initiatives from the Nordic side could kickstart wider networking in which the Kaliningrad region would also be actively involved.

In Russia, topical seminars arranged by the offices in an effort to bring people working in different sections of society together were considered useful for receiving information about the possibilities for cooperation and social networking. The Russian educational institutions hoped that the organizational support and co-operation with the offices in arranging international seminars would continue. In Estonia, help from the offices was requested to galvanize Russian counterparts into more intense educational exchange action.

As far as the offices are concerned, they see a diminishing role for themselves in the field of educational cooperation in the future. The generally held view is that very little is known about the future plans, and it is more than likely that their responsibility in the new Nordplus programme will only entail acting as observers and consultants.

5.3 Social and health sector

Since the onset of the NCM's activities in the region, the social and health sector has been considered one of the most important issue areas in cooperation with the adjacent areas.¹⁸ At present, it seems that the role of the local offices in cooperating with the social sector in the Baltic countries is becoming less pronounced. The reason for this is that contacts with the local partners are already well established and at the moment the interaction mostly consists of sharing information and organizing seminars.

In Russia, the work of the St Petersburg office in the social and health sector is now focused on large-scale cooperation with local authorities, and it is hoped that the efforts will lead to long-lasting results in the future. The Kaliningrad office is only in the very early stages of building partnerships between different societal actors.

Since the concerted campaign against trafficking in women in 2002-04 and the "Action Plan Against Drugs" in 2003-05, there have been no regional projects or sound initiatives in this sector. The new programme "Children with Disabilities and their Families in the Baltic Countries and Northwest Russia" is expected to provide fresh impetus for regional cooperation. In the Baltic countries, contacts between the offices and local authorities working in the social and health sector are well established and communication is said to flow smoothly in both directions. However, contacts are irregular and their intensity varies from project to project.

There were some differences between the Baltic countries in their engagement in the social sector. In Estonia, officials said that the cooperation with the local office is merely information exchange and, for example, when it comes to gender issues the NCM's Secretariat is seen to be a much more important partner in cooperation because of the expertise and knowledge available there. Gratitude was expressed for the NCM office's energy in raising many important issues during the years, but there was also the sentiment that the NCM's office is no longer visible in social issues and that in Estonia the office is associated mostly with cultural activities. The "Disabled Children and their Wellbeing" conference organized by the Tallinn office in March 2007 could perhaps be seen as a step towards closer cooperation with the authorities.

In Lithuania, the relations between the office and the authorities and NGOs have remained close due to intense working group meetings. In Lithuania there is also interest in cooperation with the Kaliningrad region in the extension of the Northern Dimension Social and Health partnership, with the NCM's Vilnius and Kaliningrad offices being seen as potential future links in this respect.

¹⁸ It is worth mentioning that one of the priorities of the Finnish presidency in the NCM of 2007 is to promote health and wellbeing.

Gender issues and their policy implications deserve more attention in the Baltic countries. Although there are government departments that deal with gender policies on different levels, gender issues are not high on the agenda in the Baltic countries. The civil servants exchange programme was considered to be very useful and helpful in developing gender policies and the "Nordic example" has aroused a lot of interest. On the ministry level, it is clearly felt that support is needed in gender issues and that the NCM offices can help, not only by providing exchange programmes but, importantly, by providing ideas outside of the state bureaucracy.

In Russia, the development of social policies at the state, regional and municipal level seems to be in a permanent phase of reorganization. At the same time, there exist very pressing and mounting social problems, ranging from drug abuse and prostitution to domestic violence. The St Petersburg office has taken an active role in developing the city's social projects. The office acts as a link between the Russian policymakers and the NGOs, who possess the expertise in the field. The Nordic experience in solving social issues is provided by the ongoing civil servants programme and by helping to locate key contacts for international seminars on current topics.

The Kaliningrad oblast is notorious for being a region of substantial social and health problems. The region has received foreign aid and support for over a decade, but the significant projects completed with foreign funding and expertise have not been targeted at the social field directly. For example, EU support is targeted at infrastructure and border capacity building, not at social issues. The problem stems not only from the lack of financial resources but also from the considerable demand for expertise and practical experience in the social sector. The office in Kaliningrad has already taken some steps in that direction by establishing cooperation with the faculty of Psychology and Social Work at the Kaliningrad State University.

A particular problem in the Kaliningrad region is the lack of dialogue between governmental and non-governmental actors in the social sector. NGOs get very limited financial support or none whatsoever from the state and they are not involved in regional politics. Nevertheless there are organizations that do extremely important work in the social sector. The Kaliningrad office has launched a joint 3-year programme with the local NGO for the work with disabled children, the most important goal being the opening of a rehabilitation centre. In practice, the contribution of the office to the work with NGOs means financial support for projects and publications, and facilitation of the relations between local governmental actors like the local ombudsman office and the NGOs. The office's most important mission at the present time is to provide grants for civil servants and other professionals to make study trips to Nordic countries. The administrative side stated that they lack information about social prob-

lems and their scope, and that for them information exchange and publications would be the most important aspect in international cooperation.

Implications for the offices

Apart from the obvious tasks of finding relevant partners for social projects, the offices, with the support of the secretariat, could also contribute to heightening the relevance of the social issues in their respective countries through seminars and workshops. Such work will help to hammer out common interests and priorities and hence facilitate the transition to a more systematic partnership between the Baltic, Russian and Nordic counterparts. Trafficking in women is an area where international efforts are needed. The offices could therefore strive to facilitate international cooperation in this field by acting as a bridge between the Russian and Baltic sides. It is also possible that stronger cooperation could be forged with other international organizations such as the CBSS.

5.4 NGOs

There is a long tradition in the Nordic countries of non-governmental organizations playing a part in societal activities and the decision-making process. In contrast, the Baltic countries and Russia lack such a tradition, and the political system has only opened up marginally to non-governmental actors. In Russia, one could even argue that the reverse has taken place, with the scope for civil society decreasing during recent years. One of the most important aspects of the NCM offices' work in the neighbouring countries has been giving support to non-governmental organizations. The offices' work with the NGOs has been focused on small-scale projects but more importantly on assistance in linking different NGOs together. In addition to the already existing projects with NGOs the NCM launched a special NGO Programme for the Baltic Sea Region in October 2006, which funds cooperation between Nordic, Baltic, Polish, Belarusian and Russian NGOs.

The Baltic countries are home to any number of skilled and enthusiastic people working in non-governmental organizations and the NGOs have also formed umbrella organizations to make their work more organized and visible. However, linkages to state or regional administration structures are still weak, and seminars and working groups arranged by the NCM offices were considered to be useful fora for circulating ideas and plans.

Russian regions are to some degree at a different stage in terms of NGO activeness. In the St Petersburg region there are a few well functioning NGOs that have already established a reputation as useful partners in the eyes of local officials. In Kaliningrad, the NGOs are more or

less invisible to the regional administration, although there are some positive signs that the situation could slowly be changing.

In the Baltic countries, NGO networking was evaluated as being under rapid development. However, the notion of civil society as crucial social capital is not completely embedded in the social structures and the channels of information exchange are not established in all places. The offices are still regarded as important links and, for example, the Information Point in Tartu was described as “a hub of ideas” where close personal level contacts form the basis of the interaction. What was wished for in the Tartu region is help in finding Russian partners for projects and securing their involvement. NGOs already have contacts in Northwest Russia but as the political relations between the countries are apt to fluctuate wildly a Nordic link could also be useful in the future.¹⁹

NGO representatives in the Baltic countries said that international contacts and networks established with the support of the NCM offices and their grants are now of help when applying for EU funding for projects. Not all the contacts lead to permanent results, but hopefully the networks that are created do continue information exchange and act as positive examples for others. The process of using the NCM's grants was described as being “pre-accession” for when EU funding became available.

In St. Petersburg the most important aspect for NGOs in the cooperation with the local office has been the opportunity to make study trips abroad. NGO workers who were interviewed said that being able to observe alternative ways of organizing work had been the most valuable experience. Implementing new ideas in Russian society is no mean feat, but it can be accomplished when local authorities take the initiative. A case in point are the night centres for children which were opened in St. Petersburg based on the “Nordic model”. Knowledge and know-how are still lacking in many fields and the wish was expressed that the information exchange with Nordic experts should be continued. International contacts can also be valuable in increasing the resources of NGOs; in St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad NGOs have also had foreign volunteers working in their organizations after trips made abroad.

Russian NGOs receive no state support and the funding has to be collected from other sources. In Kaliningrad, interviewees stated that just a handful of organizations are working in the region with foreign financial support because they do not have the required knowledge or skills to fill in the applications or make reports in a foreign language. The part that the local office plays in helping with NGO networking could be very important in the future. Both Russian offices have contacted NGOs directly by inviting them to receive information or participate in working

¹⁹ The recent incident between Estonia and Russia concerning the removal of the Bronze Soldier statue is reported to have already affected the working atmosphere when it comes to interactions not only between the authorities but also between non-governmental actors in both countries.

groups or programmes, which is a good practice. International contacts are important for many NGOs, but in Kaliningrad, for example, where NGOs are struggling with basic practical problems like where to find the money for a fire safety system on their premises to avoid being closed down, international networking won't be their first priority.

Implications for the offices

The NCM offices are mainly working with and supporting NGOs that operate in the social field with matters relating to the disabled, women's issues and human rights. The biggest difficulty that NGOs face, besides the obvious lack of funds, concerns the continuity of their work. In most cases in the Baltic countries and Russia there is still no institutional basis or established practices for NGO involvement in the societal processes – therefore collaboration always depends on the personal interests of the officials and links can easily vanish with a change in the power structure. The joint steering and working groups have had some positive results in enhancing the visibility of NGO work in society and in making knowledge available to officials. The offices' work with NGOs will surely continue and if they go on to act as coordinators of international conferences and smaller-scale working seminars then this could be the way to guarantee the continuity of the cooperation between different actors in society.

The new Baltic Sea NGO programme is aiming to include Belarusian organizations as well. This poses a major challenge since NGOs in Belarus are not only outsiders as far as the system is concerned, but the state authorities also view them as opponents. Belarusian NGOs lack experience in networking and therefore the NCM offices could come up with efficient ways to spread information about the programme by using their local contacts.

5.5 Cross-border cooperation

The NCM activities in the field of cross-border cooperation were given a fresh boost in 2005 when the Baltic Euroregional Network (BEN) was launched. The BEN network combines different actors under one project, namely the Euroregions, other regional projects, NGOs and local authorities. The BEN network is a continuation of the earlier NCM two-year pilot project "Cross-border cooperation in the Baltic countries and Northwest Russia" which was completed at the end of June 2005. BEN is financed by the EU Baltic Sea Region Interreg III B Neighbourhood Programme, and the project will run until the end of 2007. The BEN strategy group, consisting of five representatives from network members, is currently preparing a proposal for the future form and functions of the network.

The Lead Partner of the BEN network is the NCM's Office in Vilnius. The other NCM offices have taken something of a back seat in the running of BEN and have acted as the "normal" partners in the network.

The goal of the BEN project is to promote spatial development and territorial integration in the Baltic Sea Region by strengthening the Euroregions as competent partners with the national authorities and international institutions. Based on our interviews, the goal of raising the status of the Euroregions has been met and the name "BEN" has gained credibility as a regional player. The network structure has made what would otherwise have been relatively unknown Euroregions more comprehensible for all the other actors and authorities in the Baltic Sea region. It has also offered a channel via which the local actors can interact with the ministries. Moreover the connections between the Euroregions themselves have improved with BEN. The NCM local offices have acted mainly as informational links and facilitators of communication between the local actors and ministries. The network has its own information emailing list and the most important part of the networking is carried out in working sub-groups and in BEN conferences that are arranged several times a year.

In the spring of 2007 a new dimension was added to cross-border cooperation when BEN-EAST was introduced and the official start-up conference was held in May in Moscow. BEN-EAST is a network that will provide new Russian and Belarusian partners with the opportunity to integrate into existing BEN activity. In conjunction with the Baltic Sea region NGO programme, BEN-EAST is intended to give new impetus to the integration process of Belarusian partners.

BEN-EAST is noticeably a Russia-focused project and the Info Point in Petrozavodsk is the lead partner of the network. BEN-EAST is warmly welcomed among Russian regional and local actors and is seen as a good way to increase the visibility and importance of the border regions in Moscow. The offices could play a major part in ensuring that the links to Nordic and Baltic actors also remain vigorous.

Implications for the offices

It seems reasonable to use the already existing structures of cross-border cooperation (the Euroregions) instead of launching completely new programmes in this sector. Now that the network has been set up, information channels have been established and the name BEN has earned a reputation and gained positive visibility, the focus in the future should be on action and on carrying out valuable regional projects.

Something that cropped up again during the interviews was the need for help in communicating with Russian actors. The NCM offices in the Baltic countries were hoping to continue their apolitical role of linking actors within the frames of this network too. The responsibility that the

offices in Vilnius, St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad have of finding new Belarusian partners and facilitating their integration is also a formidable task.

The Euroregions do not need the NCM offices as such anymore since they have established contacts with their local partners and other network members. It was pointed out though that without good coordination and an ethos of joint responsibility, networks tend to dissolve quickly when everyone is busy concentrating on their own issues. NCM offices are regarded as good neutral links in holding the Nordic-Baltic-Russian network together. The future role of the offices depends on the future of BEN. Whether BEN will be continued under the coordination of the NCM or CBSS, or just as a series of conferences remains to be seen.

5.6 Culture

Culture has an obvious value in any international interaction, and it can't be denied that cultural activities have a part to play in building the image of the NCM and enhancing its visibility. Furthermore, international connections established in the field of culture do have far-reaching effects: cultural exchange opens doors to innovative thinking and creativity in societies.

NCM's activities in the cultural field are undergoing a process of massive reconstruction and the future is a big question mark for all actors involved. The offices, Baltic and Russian Ministries of Culture, cultural institutions and individual artists are all uncertain to a greater or lesser degree about the future possibilities for cooperation. Ministries are aware of the goals of equal partnership, but the substance of the future cooperation remains obscure.

The guidelines for cultural interaction and exchange programmes have been under preparation during 2006-2007 and the offices were not able to actively initiate very much at the current time. The offices do hope that their views and ideas are going to be heard before the new plans are moulded. The new approach in cultural cooperation will be to cooperate with "structures" aka ministries and institutions, albeit the grants for individual exchange will also be provided. The role of the offices as grant application evaluators will not continue in the way it does now, but their local expertise will be utilized in defining the key partners to co-operate with in joint projects. This partner search is not easy to carry out in a situation where guidelines are not yet clarified and the offices do not know what they can offer.

In all countries the role of the offices as cultural actors and organizers is highly appreciated by the partners in the ministries as well as among the cultural organizations. Nordic embassies and consulates do play a part in cultural co-operation, but the offices were regarded as the leading Nor-

dic partners in cultural activities in all cities, with the exception of Kaliningrad where the Swedish Consulate is more active.

The view presented in the Baltic countries is that the NCM offices are important mediators of cultural contacts and also platforms from which Baltic culture can expand abroad. In Latvia and Estonia the offices were considered to be important actors at the regional level as well. In Lithuania, the office's initiative in the work with children and the promotion of reading was singled out as a particularly significant co-project. In the Kaliningrad region the priorities with regard to future action are somewhat different from those elsewhere. The city of Kaliningrad is only a medium-sized ordinary Russian city and cannot offer such a wide range of cultural treasures as the Baltic capitals or St. Petersburg. Priorities set for future projects by the local representation of the Ministry of Culture include restoring the cultural heritage of the region and culture projects that attract tourists.

The highly popular grants for individual artists administered through the Sleipnir Programme are subsumed under a new mobility and network programme and cultural cooperation will have a more institutionalized basis for action after 2007. As far as the disconnected Sleipnir programme is concerned: there are many examples of successful individual trips abroad that have had wider impacts. After visiting Nordic countries the scholarship-holders have acted as pioneers of small "cultural revolutions" in their own countries by introducing new thinking, methods and management into cultural life. By changing the focus in cultural cooperation from individual to institution-based, the offices may lose contact with interesting and energetic artists who have a strong personal interest in international projects. Nevertheless, the new proposal was also described as ambitious and the offices are keen to start working on new projects.

The work of the offices in the cultural sector is diverse. They act not only as sponsors of projects but also actively arrange different events. In Estonia, the office has a high profile as an organizer of big festivals, namely the Nordic Poetry Festival and the Nordic Drama Days. In Latvia, Nordic Spring with its dozens of events has been arranged for the third time. In Lithuania the biggest event this summer is Common Shores, which is not only a culture project but a combination of culture, education and discussions on the future of the Baltic Sea region. The office in St. Petersburg is arranging the second cross-cultural Nordic Look fashion show in the Anna Akhmatova museum. In addition, the offices act as initiators of small events and projects around the year. The offices already enjoy fruitful contacts with local cultural institutions like theatres, museums and other art institutions, which should also benefit from the development of future cooperation.

Implications for the offices

Although the future of the cooperation in the cultural sector is still open when it comes to the practical arrangements, there is no doubt that there will be skilled and enthusiastic people ready to collaborate in this field. There are two additional dimensions that could receive more attention in the future in cultural activities: educational and social aspects. The practices and ideas that some of the offices are already implementing could be put to wider use. In Lithuania, a cultural-educational project is being planned together with the Ministry of Culture that explores new ways of exploiting museums as educational sites of learning. In addition, the Anna Akhmatova museum together with the St. Petersburg office strongly prioritize educational and social activities and have instigated projects for disabled children. Cross-cultural projects that celebrate Nordic, Baltic and Russian traditions and as well as provide scope for experimental new ideas are perhaps the most interesting ideas in the field of culture that the offices have set in motion.

The Ministries of Culture are open to future cooperation and a joint action plan for culture would be the next step in the relations. The issue of co-financing could be problematic though: in the Baltic countries they are concerned that 2008 will simply come too soon for any new plans and projects to be supported in the state budget. In Kaliningrad the attitude was more optimistic towards the equality goals, but they also expect the cultural cooperation to bring financial benefits to the region in a long-term plan.

It is also crucial to keep the media interested in the Nordic culture projects. The offices may have slightly uneven resources when it comes to taking care of this matter since they don't all have a member of staff whose main responsibility is to interact with the media and promote visibility.

6. Conclusions

6.1 The future relevance of the NCM Offices in the Baltic countries and the future forms of activity

In view of the fact that the Nordic-Baltic cooperation has shifted from initial assistance policies to a new “phase” of equal partnership, it may seem that the primary goal of the offices has now been accomplished. Their role as administrators of the NCM programmes has diminished as the programmes are now being reorganized so as to enable direct cooperation between the Baltic and Nordic partners. From being the beneficiaries of assistance policies, not only of the NCM but also of the EU and other organizations, the Baltic countries have become full-fledged members of European integration and regional cooperation. In fact, the Baltic membership of the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) as well as their membership as observers in NordForsk goes to show that these countries are closer to “Norden” than mere neighbours. Cooperation can now take place in a more straightforward fashion, bypassing “interlocutors” such as the NCM offices.

In this regard, one could entertain the idea of closing down the Baltic offices. This move, however, is likely to bring more disadvantages than benefits. First, closing down the offices could be interpreted as a sign of relegating the Baltic states as partners and de-prioritizing the Nordic-Baltic cooperation. The offices have been playing an important symbolic role by displaying the “Nordic swan” in the Baltic capitals. Their “visual” function as representatives of Nordic-Baltic cooperation has not diminished with time. On the contrary, if the Nordic-Baltic cooperation is going to develop towards political interaction between various ministries and governmental agencies, it may risk losing touch with the general public and its attractiveness in the eyes of possible partners along with it. It is worth pointing out here that Nordic cooperation as such has experienced something of a loss of popularity among the people in the Nordic countries. The reason for this is that in the eyes of the people it has become too mundane and self-evident and at the same time somewhat bureaucratic and dull. The information points and offices that Nordic institutions have set up throughout the Nordic region are tasked with raising the profile of Nordic cooperation at home. This is all the more topical as far as the cooperation with the neighbouring countries is concerned.

Secondly, with all the talk of “equal partnership” and “equal footing”, the practices of such cooperation are still very nascent and in some policy sectors, for example in the field of NGOs, have already proved to be a

difficult task. The general view is that the offices will be expected to act as regional coordinators and interlocutors for some time, even when the practices of direct cooperation are put to work. Indeed, if one can think of cooperation as an ongoing process with new partners joining and new initiatives emerging, a complete withdrawal of the offices from the process would impede the work on bringing in new partners and circulating initiatives. If this work is left to the Baltic ministries, it is unclear whether they have sufficient resources or motivation to ensure the intensity of cooperation. The national Baltic ministries were not created with the aim of cooperating with the Nordic countries, in the way it is envisaged today. Also, the accession to the EU is draining enormous human and financial resources in terms of interaction with EU institutions. When actually discussing the possible role of the NCM offices in the future, the representatives of the ministries expressed some hope that the offices would monitor the ongoing Nordic-Baltic cooperation and define the areas that could benefit from further cooperation. In particular, more mobility and exchange is needed to raise awareness of the cross-sectoral, "comprehensive" approach in the social and labour policies.

As far as the future activities of the offices are concerned, it could be an idea to differentiate between them, and tailor the profile of each Baltic office individually. The Baltic countries are different in their internal social and economic development. If, for example, in Estonia the most pressing problem seems to be too rapid economic growth and a certain "overheating" of the economy, corruption is an acute problem in Lithuania. In this regard, the role of the offices in identifying the most topical issues is indispensable. In practice, one can put more emphasis on topics that would be of mutual interest when organizing events and seminars between the Nordic and Baltic partners.

At present the workload seems to be distributed rather unevenly: the Vilnius office is clearly overstretched having the EHU on its hands, whereas the offices in Riga and Tallinn might seem to be less busy. Seeing as in both Latvia and Estonia, and to a lesser degree in Lithuania, the problems of integrating Russian-speakers are common, one could wish for more cooperation between the offices in addressing this issue. Indeed, the Nordic societies have accumulated a vast amount of experience on the issues of multiculturalism and integration, which could be brought to the attention of the Baltic countries.

Finally, in light of the common interest of the Baltic and Nordic countries towards Belarus, there could be a niche for the offices to be instrumental in this emerging interaction with this common and obviously problematic neighbour. This could also be a pivotal point on which the offices and the Nordic Council could be drawn together. It was due to the activism of the Nordic parliamentarians that the NCM offices were established in the neighbourhood. If one day the question of opening an office

in Belarus becomes politically and practically feasible, the experience of the offices will be indispensable.

6.2 The NCM Information Offices in Northwestern Russia

The situation in Russia seems to have changed considerably in the past few years. Firstly, there is a clear willingness to cooperate with the Nordic partners as well as a firm wish to be able to have a say in the process. This, however, does not seem to pose a major problem as the Nordic partners would like to respond to Russia's wishes in a mutually cooperative way. The problem has been that the Russian priorities seem to differ according to who is asked to identify them: the higher the level, the more "strategic" and "political" the expectations and priorities become.

For the time being, the priorities seem to correspond with Russia's interest in strengthening its economy and thus range from investments to infrastructure and development in the sphere of innovation and new technologies. There are some kind of differing expectations on the Russian and the Nordic side in terms of priorities. While the Russians are clearly interested in developing the sectors of the economy that bring the most profit, the Nordic partners are interested in social issues that require financial and intellectual investment. Some commonality of interest can be found in the field of education and innovation: the universities in Russia's Northwestern regions are interested in cooperation and exchange, which would facilitate their relations with the business sector.

Secondly, just as there is a willingness to set priorities, there is also capacity for co-financing. The Russian partners do not regard contributing financially to the cooperation projects as a problem. In fact, this has been a working practice for the cooperation projects with the EU. The capacity for co-financing varies, however, from the level of cooperation. For example, the so-called "national projects" – the newly established instruments with which the government attempts to develop the regions – are very ample in terms of funding. An idea was expressed that the NCM programmes could be somehow coordinated with the strategies of the "national projects" in the issue areas where such synergy would be mutually beneficial. This, however, might pose practical difficulties for both Russian and Nordic partners. There is no mechanism for such integration of different policies nor is it clear what policy level one should focus on in order to establish such cooperation.

At this point, an optimal solution could be found in carrying on the work at the level where it is both visible and effective: St Petersburg city and the regions of the Northwest including Kaliningrad, while nurturing the already existing contacts. At the same time, on occasion, Moscow can be approached, too: a large-scale conference on cross-border cooperation

in May 2007 attracted some attention to the NCM in the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the President's Office.

As far as the information offices are concerned, their presence is perceived as positive and important in terms of organizing seminars where the Nordic and Russian experts could share their experience. The situation in Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg is different in that respect. In the Kaliningrad region there is an acute need for initial information work and for introducing the NCM and its information office. In this regard, one could foster better links between the two Russian information offices and the three info points, as at the moment there is not a great deal of cooperation. Cooperation, however, should not be organized just for the sake of it, as there should always be concrete purposes. One such clear context is provided by the BEN-East project.

In all, the IOs seem to be indispensable for the Nordic-Russian cooperation: everyone approached on the matter agreed that the cooperation would have hardly been feasible had the information offices been closed.

6.3 The problem of communication

Of all the many aspects of the work of the offices, communication seems to be the most important. It has been continuously reported that a smooth communication process between the secretariat and the offices is crucial in every respect of the work of the offices (and the NCM policies in the neighbourhood). In all, there is a genuine willingness and readiness to communicate both in Copenhagen and in the offices. Seen from the offices' perspective, the situation in their respective countries changes fast and requires an equally fast response. The prevailing mode of thinking in Copenhagen is strategic, and oriented towards long-term objectives. Sometimes the offices have to wait for confirmation from Copenhagen even though some agreement has been reached with a local partner. This casts the offices in a negative light in terms of their responsiveness and, by implication, tarnishes the image of the NCM in general.

Sometimes communication can be strained due to the fact that the members of staff of the secretariat rotate much faster in Copenhagen than in the offices on account of different contract schemes. This sometimes causes longer delays and interruptions in the communication process. One of the recent and most unfortunate examples is that for half a year in 2006 there was no advisor on cooperation with Russia and the Barents region installed in Copenhagen.

Language is another factor that affects communication. Most of the offices use the languages of their respective countries and one of the Nordic languages (most often Swedish) when communicating with the secretariat. While it is understandable that the language used should be widely comprehensible within the organization, one could also point out

that the NCM has, from its inception, been exposed to several, even very closely related Nordic languages, as well as the Finnish language outside this language group. In practice, when communicating among themselves, the offices use English or Russian (a language still widely understood and used in the Baltic countries). In order to streamline the communication process, one could think of widening the use of English. There is one caveat, however. In Russia, the use of Russian is seen as a matter of protocol and often of respect for the country. There are also practical considerations as the older generation might have no command of a foreign language. In light of the expansion of cooperation with Russia due to the opening of an information office in Kaliningrad as well as the emerging cooperation with Belarus (where Russian is commonly used) one could recommend that the Secretariat increases its knowledge of Russia both through its information offices and other sources.²⁰

One way to address the problem of communication might be to strengthen the “vertical” rapport between the offices and the Secretariat, for example between the office directors and the Secretary General and his office. Another idea that cropped up in the interviews was to carry out a sort of internal code of conduct which would clarify the procedures, for example by setting deadlines for a response from one department to another concerning a project proposal or an email request. As a third option, one could think of setting up special panels or boards that could take on the task of coordinating the work of the offices. However, these measures could prove to be rather bureaucratic and technical and end up promoting more confusion than clarity.²¹ They might also sit uneasily with the overall design of the NCM as an open “contemporary” organization with a minimal hierarchy and, by implication, fewer bureaucratic bottlenecks.

To increase communication within the NSM secretariat, one idea worth exploring would be to organize a longer training period for the staff of the offices. This idea generated a lot of interest and could be beneficial for the organization overall. The interviewees often commented on the noticeable difference in perception and awareness of how the NCM works before and after trips to Copenhagen. After all, if the offices are equal in status to the departments of the secretariat, the members of staff should not feel like “guests” or “visitors” in the organization.

Also, one could think of a better use for the Internet, such as web platforms or restricted websites that would be dedicated to specific areas and which would allow for teamwork online.

²⁰ An interesting detail that signifies the importance of Russia for the NCM was that one could find “traces” of Russia such as books, calendars and small souvenirs in almost every department of the Secretariat.

²¹ See Ojanen’s analysis of the case of Advisory Boards that were set up in order to facilitate the NCM’s external policies but which ended in failure. Ojanen H (2004) “Small but Smart?” Assessment of the NCM’s policies for the adjacent areas. [http://www.norden.org/ruweb/docs/08-assessment.pdf](http://www.norden.org/ruweb/docs/08-<u>assessment.pdf</u>)

Communication between the offices themselves is a matter that deserves attention. As such it emerges sporadically and depends on personal links or individual projects. In this regard, one could envisage a more systematic approach to communication between the offices. For example, one could envisage the five offices as a network that could perform coordinated tasks and projects. In some way, a move in this direction has been made in the case of the BEN and BEN-East projects. With the leading partners at the Vilnius office and the information point in Murmansk, the other offices were part of the network operation. This could be seen as a positive example of a network with shifting coordinators and no strict hierarchy.

In all, the most welcome measure from the point of view of the offices is that information concerning their own future has been communicated to them with greater clarity from Copenhagen. The feeling of not being needed in the future or uncertainty about their purpose, understandable at a time when the policies for the neighbourhood are being redesigned, can be a demotivating factor in their work, a mood which easily gets picked up by their counterparts and which, in turn, could create a negative image for the NCM as a whole.

6.4 The problem of visibility

Despite the fact that the goals and purposes of the offices have been changing over time, the task of maintaining a visible profile for the NCM in the neighbouring countries always seems to be topical. It is likely that in the future, irrespective of the type of activities that the offices will be focussing on, visibility will remain of paramount importance. At present, the image of the offices remains ambiguous: they are perceived as an important link to Nordic partners and funding, as organizers of cultural events or simply as a resource that could be used whenever needed. The latter opinion was particularly characteristic of the Nordic embassies.

The somewhat sluggish interaction with the Nordic embassies, a common feature in almost every neighbouring country, is a case in point. The NCM offices are seen as primarily a good resource, an additional pair of hands when it comes to organizing events or other projects. If the offices are more proactive in presenting themselves and their ideas to the embassies and other Nordic actors in the neighbouring countries, one might expect a more constructive type of cooperation. The offices could play the role of communicators between various organizations, which would reinforce their profile as responsible and dynamic actors, as agenda-setters instead of a passive resource at someone's disposal.

Understandably, the image of the offices varies depending on the context in which they become familiar to their counterparts and it would be difficult, and arguably not altogether necessary, to strive for complete

unity in the profile of the offices. Each office may have a particular face, albeit not too different from the others. After all, the offices are supposed to represent one main principle: Nordic cooperation. At this point, however, the question of what “Norden” is becomes pertinent. Indeed it is difficult to improve visibility and act proactively if it is not clear what it is exactly that should be made visible.

Culture is very important in this regard. It is understandable that in the Baltic countries and in St. Petersburg, the Nordic culture may be well represented; there are Nordic cultural institutes that work in the field. Besides there could be different trends and the popularity of a particular region may vary over time. Still, the Nordic region has proved to be fairly popular and it continues to be of interest to the audience. In Kaliningrad, the niche for Nordic cultural events and other activities seems to be vacant. At the same time, one could regard “culture” in a broader sense: as a lifestyle, an attitude to various social and environmental issues, a way to build partnership between business and the rest of society. In this sense, the NCM offices can increase their visibility and resolve the problem of representing something abstractly “Nordic”, by filling this concept with attractive and relevant contents. The projects such as Nordic Fashion Week and Nordic Food can be seen as examples of such a re-thinking of “culture” as a way to ensure that “Norden” remains both familiar and intriguing for the neighbours.

Appendix 1

List of interviewees

Finland

Jan-Erik Enestam, Director of the Secretariat of the Nordic Council
Johan Tiedemann, the Swedish representative at the Nordic Cooperation Committee
Harri Mäki-Reinikka, the Finnish representative at the Nordic Cooperation Committee,
the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
Ritva Kattelus, former Director of the NCM Information Office in Saint Petersburg

Norway

Eilif Gundersen, former Norwegian representative at the Nordic Cooperation
Committee, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Dagfinn Høybråten, President of the Nordic Council

Sweden

Boetscher Bjarka, Senior Advisor, Council of the Baltic States
Kötschau Gabriele, Director of the Permanent Secretariat of the Council of the
Baltic Sea States
Per Larsson, former Advisor on Russia, NCM Secretariat (phone interview)
Bo Lindroos, Chargé d'Affaires, The Embassy of Finland
Nyman Sofia Ekfeldt, Senior Advisor, CBSS
Saprykin Phil, Deputy Director, CBSS
Per Unckel, former Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers

Denmark

Halldor Asgrimsson, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers
Tore Aas-Hanssen, Head of Department, NCM
Kenneth Broman, Senior Advisor, NC
Jean-Yves Gallardo, Advisor, Department for Culture and Equality, NCM Secretariat
Henrik Hagemann, Head of the Danish Secretariat, Danish Parliament
Riitta Heinämaa, Senior Adviser, NCM
Heikkilä Thomas, Senior Adviser, Nordic Cultural Fund
Karsten Ankjaer Jensen, The Nordic Committee for Cooperation, Danish Ministry
for Foreign Affairs
Kjell Myhre-Jensen, Head of the Norwegian Secretariat, Norwegian Parliament
Kalli Klement, former Director of the NCM office in Estonia
Frida Nokken, Secretary General, NC
Vagn Egede Olsen, Head of Department, NCM
Maria-Pia de Palo, Advisor, NCM Secretariat
Ane Kofod Petersen, Advisor in Russia and Barents Cooperation, Department for
Environment and Resources, NCM Secretariat
Jens Nytoft Rasmussen, Senior Advisor, NC
Ole Stavvad, Member of the Danish Parliament, former President of the Nordic Council

Eva Smekal, Head of Swedish Secretariat, Swedish Parliament
Sorensen Torkil, Advisor, NCM Secretariat
Dorthe Elise Svinth, Senior Advisor in International Affairs, Office of the Secretary General, NCM Secretariat
Rune Thele, Senior Advisor, Control Committee, Nordic Council
Vadim Thelin, Advisor, NCM Secretariat
Gard Titlestad, Head of Department for Research and Education, NCM Secretariat
Jan Widberg, Senior Advisor, NC Secretariat
Patrick Zilliacus, Counsellor for International Affairs, former head of Finnish Secretariat, Finnish Parliament

Estonia

Irina Aab, Chief Specialist in School Budget Issues Development Service, Department of Education of Tartu City Government
Eike Eller, Head of International Relations Department, Ministry for Culture
Dag Hartelius, Ambassador of Sweden
Meelis Joost, Chairman of the Board of the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People, Chairman for the Tartu Norwegian Society
Kertu Kaera, Political Officer, European Commission Representation in Estonia
Jaakko Kalela, Ambassador of Finland
Madis Kanarbik, Adviser of the NCM's Office in Tartu
Mika Keränen, Adviser of the Foreign Relations Division, Ministry of Education and Research
Merle Kuusk, Adviser of the NCM's Office in Tallinn
Varje Kuut, Adviser of EuroCollege, University of Tartu
Grete Kodi, Adviser of the NCM's Office in Tallinn
Küllli Kõrgesaar, Exchange Programme Coordinator, Estonian University of Life Sciences
Madis Lepajõe, Deputy Secretary General of Foreign Relations, Ministry of Education and Research
Kristiina Luht, Chief Specialist, Ministry for Social Affairs
Sulev Lääne, Advisor, Ministry for Regional Affairs
Marko Merevoo, NordproLink scholarship holder
Eilika Mölder, Project Leader for BEN at Peipsi Centre for Transboundary Cooperation
Katrin Olenko, Vice-director of EuroCollege, University of Tartu
Carita Pettersson, Director, NCM Office
Karin Pihl, Chief Specialist in ICT issues, Department of Education of Tartu City Government
Tiina Stelmach, Eesti Agrenska Foundation, Member of the Council
Silvi Teesalu, Danish Cultural Institute
Maie Tihkan, Chief Specialist in Supervision, Department of Education of Tartu City Government
Reiu Tüür, Sleipnir Scholarship Holder
Eha Vain, Adviser of the NCM's Office in Tallinn
Jaana Vasama, Director Finnish Institute in Estonia
Lea Vedder, Director of Peipsi Centre for Transboundary Cooperation
Stein Vegard Hagen, Ambassador of Norway
Kadi Viik, Head of Gender Equality Programme, Ministry for Social Affairs
Tiiu Viljasaar, Advisor, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Aret Vooremäe, Head of Foreign Relations Department of Estonian University of Life Sciences

Lithuania

Inga Abariute, Adviser, Children's Rights Ombudsman Office
Vidas Andrikis, Nordprolink scholarships holder

Virginija Ambrazevičienė, Senior Specialist of Foreign Relations Department of Ministry of Health Care
Audrone Astrauskienė, Director of Drugs Control Department, at the office
Danguolė Bublienė, Secretary of the Ministry, Ministry of Education and Science
Steinar Gil, Ambassador of Norway
Vida Gintautaitė, Adviser for social and welfare issues
Vida Gražienė, Head of International Relations and European Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture
Teppo Heiskanen, Director, NCM Office
Chuck Howell, Country Representative of USAID in Belarus
Vilma Janulytė, Chief Specialist for Public Relations, Drug Control Department under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania
Renatas Juška, Director of Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Alina Juškienė, Executive Director of the European Humanities University
Rūta Kačkutė, Adviser of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Seimas of Lithuania
Jurgita Kazlauskaitė, Adviser, Children's Rights Ombudsman Office
Mindaugas Kavaliauskas, Closer Culture Neighbours scholarship holder
Laimutė Kreivytė, Sleipnir Scholarship Holder
Edita Kriščiūnienė, Acting Head of Democracy Promotion Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Sergejus Krišpinovičius, Director of Regional Policy Department, Ministry of Interior of Lithuania
Igoris Kržečkovskis, Adviser of Financial Crime Investigation Service, Civil Servants Exchange scholarship holder
Malin Kärre, Ambassador of Sweden
Timo Lahelma, Ambassador of Finland
Anatoly Mikhailov, Rector of the European Humanities University
Renita Paleckienė, Director of Lithuanian Journalism Centre
Žygimantas Pavilionis, MFA Undersecretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Jurgita Pečiūrienė, Director of Women's Issues Information Centre
Giedrė Purvaneckienė, Adviser to the Prime Minister, former Parliament member, Deputy Chairman of the Lithuanian delegation to the Baltic Assembly
Edvilas Raudonikis, Head of Baltic and Nordic Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Šarūnas Radvilavičius, Deputy Director, NCM Office
Nina Ronlev, Nordprolink scholarships holder
Rimantė Šalaševičiūtė, Head of Children's Rights Ombudsman Office
Erika Sausverde, Head of Centre of Scandinavian Studies, Vilnius University
Danas Skramtai, Closer Culture Neighbours scholarship holder
Dalia Strimaitytė, Senior Specialist of International Relations and European Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture
Jurga Strumskienė, Head of International Cooperation and European Integration Division of the Ministry of Education and Science
Irma Anneli Timonen, Lecturer in Finnish, Centre of Scandinavian Studies, Vilnius University
Brigita Urmanaitė, Adviser for culture and education
Artūras Vasiliauskas, European Humanities University project coordinator
Jurgis Vilčinskis, Press Officer of EC Representation
Giedrius Viliūnas, Adviser to the Minister of Education and Science, Ministry of Education and Science
Neringa Žukauskaitė, Sleipnir scholarship holder
Rolandas Žygelis, Nordprolink scholarships holder

Kaliningrad

Sergey Batalin Head of the Committee on Interregional, International Relations and Law Kaliningrad Regional Duma, Duma deputy
Sergey Bezberezhiev, Representative of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kaliningrad Office
Vladimir Borisovich, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Culture
Sergey Buchelnikov, Minister, Ministry for Housing and Communal Services and Constructing of the Kaliningrad region
Arne Grove, Director, NCM IO
Alla Ivanova, Director of EU Projects Local Support Office
Yulia Kandalova, Project Coordinator, NCM IO (email interview)
Sergey Kiselev, Director of Disabled Children and Youth NGO "Apparel", Kaliningrad branch
Zoya Kochetkova, Director of Disabled children's parents NGO "Maria"
Svetlana Larina, Consultant, Office of the Commissioner on the human rights in the Kaliningrad region
Sergey Matveev, Vice-rector for Information technologies, Immanuel Kant Russian State University
Maxim Mikhailov, Energy expert
Lubov Pavlova, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Culture
Mikhail Pluchin, Minister, Ministry of the Territory Development and Cooperation with the Local Authorities
Alexander Rolbinov, Minister, Ministry for Infrastructure Development
Viktor Romanovsky, Head of the Department for Coordination of activities of Representatives of the Kaliningrad region
Ekaterina Shaktorina, Deputy Dean on Scientific work and International Relations, Faculty of Psychology and Social Work, Immanuel Kant Russian State University, Social Pedagogic
Pavel Vesheav, Disabled children and Youth NGO "Apparel", Kaliningrad branch
Dmitry Vyshemirskie, Photo Artist
Vera Zobotkina, Vice-rector for International Relations, Immanuel Kant Russian State University

Latvia

Barbara Abele, Design Project Manager, Latvian Academy of Art
Patricia Brekte, Sleipnir grant holder
Arnold de Fine Skibsted, Ambassador of Denmark
Linda Freimane, Participant of the NordProLink programme
Agnese Gaile, Head of Gender Equality Unit, Ministry of Welfare
Andris Gobins, President, NGO European Movement Latvia
Imants Gross, Director, NCM Office
Māra Grudule, Head of Cooperation Projects Unit, Latvian School of Public Administration
Simon Drewsen-Holmberg, Director, Danish Culture Institute in Riga
Ieva Hermansone, Advisor, NCM Office
Irina Isajeva, Latvian prison administration, Ministry of Interior
Anda Karnīte, Public Health Agency
Māra Katvare, Deputy Director of the European Affairs Department, Ministry of Education and Science
Valdis Krastins, Ambassador, CBSS, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Dita Lāce, Resource Centre for Women "Marta"
Marika Laizane-Jurkane, Head of Secretariat, Baltic Assembly
Daina Mezecka, Advisor NCM Office
Anda Orchard, Deputy Head of EU Department, MFA
Nils Olav Stava, Ambassador of Norway

Inga Purina, Advisor, NCM office
Una Sedleniece, Acting Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Culture
Iveta Skripste, Public Health Agency
Ginta Tropa, Advisor, NCM office
Anna-Lisa Trulsson Evidon, Counsellor, Embassy of Sweden
Karlis Valters, advisor NCM office, industry, R&D, Nordprolink, BEN.
Pekka Wouristo, Ambassador of Finland
Inga-Lill Åberg, Second Secretary, Embassy of Sweden

St Petersburg

Zhanna Alexandrova, Chief, Committee for international and regional cooperation, Leningrad oblast
Alexeyeva Natalia; *Peipsi* project (Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation, BEN partner), representative in St. Petersburg
Tatiana Baklanova, NordProLink scholarship holder
Julia Bylenok, Sleipnir Scholarship Holder
Valentin Chmil, Head of the Social and Economic development Department Administration of Leningrad region
Igor Demyanenko, Deputy Representative, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, representative in St. Petersburg
Denis Dobrynin, Arkhangelsk Regional Youth Environmental Public Organization "Aetas", phone conversation
Sergey Ershov, Head of the Murmansk Regional Culture and Arts Committee Administration of Murmansk region (phone interview)
Evgeny Galkin, Murmansk Government, International department
Elena Golubeva, Vice Director, NCM Office
Lene La Cour Dessler, Consul; Danish Consulate General in St. Petersburg
Minna Hanhijärvi, Director, NCM Office
Rikke Helms, Director, The Danish Cultural Institute
Marianne Hultberg, SIDA, Consul; Swedish Consulate General in St. Petersburg
Tatiana Karabanova, project coordinator, NCM Infopoint in Murmansk
Paula Karppinen, Consul; Finnish Consulate General in St. Petersburg
Maria Korosteleva, Director of Anna Akhmatova Museum
Igor Kharpukhin, Lawyer, Konsu company
Vassily Kostukevich, Murmansk Government, Committee for education
Elena Khoroshkina, Head of the NCM Infopoint in Arkhangelsk (email interview)
Olga Kareva, Vyborg municipalities, BEN partner
Leena Liski, Consul; Finnish Consulate General in St. Petersburg
Sergey Litvinov, First deputy, St. Petersburg committee for labour market and social issues
Evgeny Makarov, Advisor to the Plenipotentiary envoy in North West Russian district
Irina Maximova, Section chief, St. Petersburg committee for labour market and social issues
Ludmila Murgulets, Vice President; Stockholm's School of Economics
Stanislav Nisimov, Vice minister, Ministry of education, Karelian Republic (phone interview)
Alexander Prokhorenko, Chief, Committee for international relations, St. Petersburg Government
Ilkka Räisänen, Consul; Finnish Consulate General in St. Petersburg
Sergei Terekhovskiy, Head of International Affairs Department, St Petersburg Legislative Assembly
Torkel Thorsen, Consul General, Norwegian Consulate General in St. Petersburg
Nikolay Toivonen, St. Petersburg university, Rector's Office, Federal project Education and strategic development,
Pavel Petrov, Head of the NCM Infopoint in Petrozavodsk (email interview)
Ekaterina Puzankova, ProArte Insitute

Maria Razumovskya, NGO Citizens Watch

Maya Rusakova, Director, NGO Stellit

Vladimir Zapevalov, Representative of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia in
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Juha Vänskä, Consul, Finnish Consulate General