The International Nordic Region

The international co-operation of the Nordic Council of Ministers

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Nordic co-operation

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

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

Nordic co-operation 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.

Nordic Council of Ministers

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Introduction

The five Nordic countries work closely together in the Nordic Council of Ministers. The co-operation is based on common values, common traditions, and a common history.

The Nordic region is also open to the surrounding world. Since the 1990s, the Nordic Council of Ministers has built up and developed close co-operation with the neighbouring countries in the Baltic Sea region. In addition, the Arctic co-operation and co-operation with the neighbours to the west, such as Canada, is under

development. The international outlook of the Nordic region also extends further, to the EU and up to the global level.

Over the years, the Nordic Council of Ministers has built up an extensive international network, and has great experience of co-operation with both countries and organisations.

The Nordic Council of Ministers allocates approximately 10 percent of its annual budget, approximately DKK 95 million, directly to co-operation with neighbouring countries.

This brochure primarily describes the co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the neighbouring countries, i.e. those in the Baltic Sea and Barents regions, as well as the Arctic and the neighbours to the west. You can find more information about the co-operation on the various home pages of the Nordic Council of Ministers, reached via the links in this brochure.

We hope you find the text informative and interesting.

Nordic Council of Ministers

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official forum for Nordic inter-governmental co-operation. The Prime Ministers have the ultimate responsibility for Nordic co-operation. In practice, responsibility is delegated to the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation and to the Nordic Committee for Co-operation (NSK), which is responsible for day-to-day co-ordination. Despite its name, the Nordic Council of Ministers, founded in 1971, consists of not

one but several separate councils of ministers.

There are 10 individual ministerial policy councils, in addition to the council of ministers for co-operation. All ministerial councils meet several times a year. Decisions in the Nordic councils of ministers must be unanimous. Issues are prepared and followed up by the various committees of senior officials, which consist of civil servants from the member countries.

Under the Nordic Council of Ministers are a number of institutions and co-operation bodies in the Nordic countries that work in various areas. Examples are NordForsk in Oslo, Nordic Culture Point in Helsinki, Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues in Stockholm, and many more.

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Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

Nordic support to the Baltic States from the end of the 1980s was instrumental in the international community recognising their new status as independent states in 1991. Co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania remains a priority for the Nordic countries, and is formalised in the NB8 co-operation, which involves various ministerial areas. In a number of areas, meetings of ministers and senior officials are held regularly, with participation from both the Nordic and the Baltic countries.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has had offices in each of the Baltic capitals since 1991. The offices play a key role in the co-operation between the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Mobility programmes

Mobility is absolutely vital for co-operation across international borders. This applies both in the public and private sectors, but it is equally important for art and culture. Consequently, the Nordic Council of Ministers, together with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, has set up a number of Nordic-Baltic mobility programmes, aimed at facilitating exchanges of employees in the public and private sectors. The same applies for practitioners in the arts and culture. By providing financial support to study visits, internships and network activities, the Nordic Council plays an active role in developing the NB8 co-operation.

www.kulturkontaktNord.org/lang-en
www.nb8grants.org

Education

In the education sector too, mobility and exchange of experiences is vital. The Nordic Council of Ministers Nordplus Programme offers financial support to educational co-operation between the Nordic and Baltic countries. Nordplus is for young and old alike, and can be used to establish contact with other interested parties in both the Nordic and Baltic countries.

www.nordplusonline.org

Nordic Council of Ministers office
in Tallinn: www.norden.ee

Nordic Council of Ministers office
in Riga: www.norden.lv/en/main

Nordic Council of Ministers office
in Vilnius: www.norden.lt

Nordic offices

The Nordic Council of Ministers network of offices in the Baltic countries and North-West Russia is unique in the Baltic Sea region. The offices have close co-operation with authorities and other organisations, and with

the embassies and consulate generals of the Nordic countries. The offices serve as catalysts in the development of co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the neighbouring countries.

Nordic Council of Ministers offices

- **Estonia** (Tallinn and Tartu)
- **Latvia** (Riga)
- **Lithuania** (Vilnius)
- **Russia** (St Petersburg, Kaliningrad, Arkhangelsk, Murmansk and Petrozavodsk)

In the co-operation with Russia, the Nordic Council of Ministers emphasises the co-ordination of initiatives with other regional organisations like the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, HELCOM, and the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

Russia

Co-operation with Russia is particularly important, since the country is the Nordic region's largest neighbour. History has shown that developments in Russia have played a direct role in security and stability of the entire Nordic region and in the development of the Baltic Sea area as a dynamic region. Consequently, the Nordic Council of Ministers prioritises close co-operation with Russia, and particularly the regions in North-West Russia that are closest to the Nordic and Baltic countries.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has two offices in Northwest Russia, in St. Petersburg since 1995 and in Kaliningrad since 2006. Projects and other initiatives

involving co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and Russia are mainly developed and implemented through the offices.

The Northern Dimension

In the co-operation with Russia, the Nordic Council of Ministers emphasises the co-ordination of initiatives with other regional organisations like the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, HELCOM, and the Council of the Baltic Sea States. In addition, the Nordic Council of Ministers works actively to contribute to The Northern Dimension.

The Northern Dimension represents a political agreement between the EU, Norway, Iceland and

Russia, and was adopted in 2006. The political framework agreement focuses on co-operation in the Baltic Sea region and the Barents region, with the aim of creating a framework for dialogue and strengthening economic co-operation, stability, competitiveness, and sustainable development.

www.arctic-council.org
www.beac.st
www.cbss.org
www.helcom.fi

The Northern Dimension contains a number of partnerships, with focus on environment, social welfare and health care, transport and logistics and, not least, culture. The Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture was the result of an initiative by the Nordic Ministers of Culture. Since 2010, the Nordic Council of Ministers has assumed

responsibility for the secretariat function in this partnership.

Within the framework of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being, the Nordic Council of Ministers has participated in projects together with Russia that have improved conditions for people with HIV/AIDS and

combated trafficking in human beings. Within the Environmental Partnership, the Nordic financial institution NEFCO participates in a large number of projects with Russia on issues such as energy efficiency.

www.ndep.org
www.ndphs.org
www.ndpculture.org
www.ndptl.org

Russia

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The flagship in the co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and Russia is the Knowledge and Networking Programme.

Co-operation programmes

The flagship in the co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and Russia is the Knowledge and Networking Programme. The aim of the programme is to increase knowledge and promote networking in civil society, education and research, economic development, and public administration, through exchange of experiences and skills.

By enabling civil servants, researchers, politicians, journalists and NGOs to participate in joint Nordic-Russian activities, cross-border networks are created that can strengthen sustainable and long-term partnerships.

Nordic Council of Ministers office
in St. Petersburg: www.norden.ru

Nordic Council of Ministers office
in Kaliningrad: www.norden39.ru

Nordic-Russian co-operation in education and research

As part of the Knowledge and Networking Programme, the Nordic Council of Ministers entered into a partnership agreement with Russia in the areas of education and research in 2011. Through the co-operation, the Nordic and Russian education and research environments will strengthen their professional ties, and deliver common input to pressing global challenges, for example in the climate and environment areas. The co-operation was officially launched in January 2013, when the first round of applications for joint projects was announced.

www.siu.no

The councils of ministers of the sectoral areas and the institutions of the Nordic Council of Ministers focus on implementing the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. For example, the Nordic Council of Ministers contributes to the implementation of the Strategy Action Plan in a number of projects, for instance forestry and contingency planning for the spread of livestock diseases. In the latest version of the Action Plan, the Nordic Council of Ministers takes responsibility for developing co-operation in the fields of bio-economy and culture, with particular focus on sustainable development.

Baltic Sea region

The Nordic Council of Ministers co-operates with the various organisations and co-operation forums of the Baltic Sea region. These include the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), which is the international co-operation organisation for the countries in the Baltic Sea region, HELCOM, which focuses on environment in and around the Baltic Sea, and the Baltic Development Forum, which brings together business and political players in the region. With its network in the Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea region, the Nordic Council of Ministers promotes the development and implementation of the regional co-operation.

Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

In 2009, the EU Commission approved a plan for broadened co-operation in the Baltic Sea region, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), with focus on environment, cohesion and competitiveness. The EUSBSR Action Plan involves a large number of projects relating to the three objectives of the strategy: to save the Baltic Sea, to connect the region, and to increase prosperity. The EUSBSR Action Plan contains

a large number of flagship projects, and this is the first time such a comprehensive strategy has been formulated for an entire region within the EU.

The focus areas of the EUSBSR are the same as those of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Nordic Council of Ministers works actively to help implement the projects, using its international network in the Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea region. By arranging debates and implementing projects and other initiatives, the Nordic Council of Ministers is working to ensure that the Baltic Sea Strategy remains high on the political agenda. The Nordic Council of Ministers considers it important that Russian partners are invited to participate in relevant projects under the EUSBSR, even though Russia is not covered by the strategy. Consequently, the Nordic Council of Ministers supports projects with Russian partners, which ensures their involvement in larger, regional, EU-financed projects.

www.cbss.org
www.helcom.fi
www.bdforum.org
www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu

NGOs

The Nordic Council of Ministers considers NGOs to play a leading role in the co-operation in the Baltic Sea region. For this reason, the Nordic Council of Ministers decided in 2006 to set up the NGO Programme for the Baltic Sea Region, which supports co-operation between NGOs in the Nordic and Baltic countries, Russia, Belarus, and Poland. The aim of the NGO Programme is to ensure that NGOs are able to influence activities in the region. The overall objective is to promote civil society and strengthen cross-border co-operation, and thereby contribute to the development of the region.

www.norden.org/ngo-balticsearegion

Belarus

Belarus shares borders with Latvia, Lithuania and Russia, and the Nordic countries have a natural interest in promoting freedom of speech, tolerance, equality, and democracy in the region.

The Nordic Council of Ministers aims to promote the development of a democratic civil society in Belarus, by supporting and co-operating with players in civil society and also, if possible, with local and regional authorities.

The Nordic Council of Ministers aims to coordinate activities in Belarus with the bilateral initiatives of the Nordic countries, but other initiatives are also to be considered in an attempt to maximise synergies. Through concrete implementation of

activities in relation to Belarus, the Nordic Council of Ministers has built up a strong partnership with the EU Commission.

European Humanities University

Since 2005, the Nordic Council of Ministers has co-operated with the EU Commission in supporting the Belarusian university in exile, European Humanities University (EHU), in Vilnius. The university opened in Minsk in 1992, and was the first Belarusian university

to introduce European standards and methods in higher education. After strong pressure from the Belarus authorities, which wanted to isolate the educational system from international influence, the university was closed in 2004. A year later, the university opened its doors in the neighbouring country of Lithuania, and in 2006 was awarded the status of a private Lithuanian university.

The university ensures that around 2000 young Belarusians have access to a free and open

Since 2005, the Nordic Council of Ministers has co-operated with the EU Commission in supporting the Belarusian university in exile, European Humanities University (EHU), in Vilnius.

education at a higher education establishment. For many of the young students and university employees, affiliation with EHU is associated with personal risk, in the form of persecution and harassment from the Belarus authorities. This underlines the need to support the university, which hopefully one day will be able to return to Belarus and promote development of democracy in the country.

Funding of the university is secured via the EHU Trust Fund, which was set up by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the EU Commission in 2008. The fund, which is administered by the Nordic Council of Ministers, guarantees efficient and

transparent administration of the funding of EHU.

www.ehu.lt
www.ehustrustfund.org

Open Europe Scholarship Scheme

The Open Europe Scholarship Scheme (OESS) is financed by the EU Commission and is administered by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Young Belarusians who fulfil the academic, linguistic and personal requirements can apply for scholarships to higher education establishments in Europe – without ideological bias and according to international academic standards. The aim of the EU and Nordic Council of Ministers is that recipients of the

scholarships, at the end of their educational programmes, will be able to return to their homeland better equipped to help future democratic development in Belarus.

www.oess.eu

Civil Society Stability for Belarus

The Nordic Council of Ministers manages the project, Civil Society Stability for Belarus (CSSB), which has supported civil society in Belarus since the presidential election in 2010. The initiative is financed by the EU Commission, and provides support to civil organisations, independent media, and victims of official repression following the election.

www.cssb.lt

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The Arctic

The Arctic is an area that is under pressure, yet offers fast-growing opportunities for development. Climate change, new shipping routes, a growing global need for energy, and technological development are promoting extraction of natural resources under challenging Arctic conditions.

Global climate change has put the environment and people in the Arctic under great pressure. The average temperature in the Arctic is rising, and glaciers and sea ice are melting, which opens up accessibility to natural resources in the area. This has consequences for the environment, society and people in the Arctic but also brings

new opportunities. Much of the Nordic land and sea areas are located in the Arctic, so the Nordic countries are strongly engaged in Arctic issues.

The Nordic countries hope that the new opportunities that are opening up in the Arctic will be utilised with respect for the environment, while ensuring the living conditions and development of the Arctic peoples. Focus is on development of a modern welfare society for the benefit of the people of the Arctic. The five Nordic countries' co-operation programme for the Arctic prioritises the environment and particularly the people who live in the region.

Arctic Council

All the Nordic countries are members of the Arctic Council, together with Canada, Russia, and USA. The Nordic Council of Ministers has had observer status in the Arctic Council since the establishment of the organisation in 1996. The Nordic Council of Ministers also works closely with other regional councils, such as the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, to create openness and networks in the Arctic. The Nordic Council of Ministers finances a number of projects and activities in the Arctic, through the Nordic-Arctic Co-operation Programme. The Nordic Council of Ministers policy sectors and institutions such as Nordforsk, Nordregio and NORA also have extensive activities in the Arctic.

www.arctic-council.org

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Neighbours to the west

Co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the neighbours to the west has increased in recent years. The neighbours to the west comprise Canada, USA, Ireland and Scotland. The Nordic countries, as well as Greenland and the Faroe Islands, have many challenges in common with their westerly neighbours, such as sparsely-populated areas, vast distances, cold climate, and a great dependence on the sea and maritime resources. Increased shipping in the Arctic affects geopolitical interests and the

strategic importance of the area. This brings new challenges and opportunities for the neighbouring countries in the Nordic and North Atlantic areas.

Co-operation between the Nordic countries within the framework of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the neighbours to the west is multilateral, and is applied where it generates Nordic added value. The co-operation complements the Nordic countries' bilateral co-operation with the neighbours to the west. The Nordic Atlantic Co-operation (NORA) is a Nordic

co-operation body with expertise about the North Atlantic co-operation.

The Nordic Council of Ministers guidelines for the co-operation with the neighbours to the west prioritise co-operation in the following areas:

- The maritime area
- Business, environment, climate and energy
- Education, research and innovation
- Culture
- Health

Co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the neighbours to the west has increased in recent years. The neighbours to the west comprise Canada, USA, Ireland and Scotland.

The Nordic region in the world

As globalisation increases, demand is growing for information about the Nordic co-operation in other parts of the world. The Nordic Council of Ministers is participating actively on various levels to strengthen joint Nordic initiatives globally. For example, Nordic co-operation is used as inspiration and a model in the Balkan region, where new structures will be built up for

international co-operation in the region. In Asia, the Nordic Council of Ministers is co-operating with the co-operation body of China, South Korea and Japan, the “Trilateral Secretariat”. Not least, the major Nordic initiative, Nordic Cool, in the Kennedy Centre in Washington has proved highly valuable. Interest in Nordic co-operation in other parts of the world is growing strongly.

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