Activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers

Annual Report 2015

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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.

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Foreword

In 2015 the Nordic Council of Ministers not only demonstrated its ability to act as a political agenda writer, but also proved that the organisation can react quickly and efficiently to events in the rest of the world.

Bo Könberg's strategic review of health in 2014 as part of the Nordic Council of Ministers' three-year Sustainable Nordic Welfare programme became a catalyst for health-related political activities throughout 2015. A series of conferences discussed key health issues, which most likely would never have featured on the political agenda without the Nordic Council of Ministers' initiative.

Although Sustainable Nordic Welfare drew to a close at the end of 2015, it has left a lasting legacy in every area it touched upon. The programme focused on innovative welfare solutions in education, research, and infrastructure.

2015 also saw a number of events outside the Nordic Region that had a considerable impact, both positive and negative, on the Nordic Council of Ministers' activities.

The year began with a development concerning Nordic co-operation with Russia following the Russian authorities' classification of the Nordic Council of Ministers as a foreign agent on the basis of a decision originating in local NGO legislation. This agent status precluded the continuation of the two decades of successful ventures in Northwest Russia carried out by the Nordic Council of Ministers' office in the country.

The spring saw the closure of operations at the Nordic Council of Ministers' offices in St Petersburg and Kaliningrad, as well as at the points of activity in Murmansk, Petrozavodsk, and Arkhangelsk.

Despite this, Nordic co-operation with Northwest Russia has not come to an end. Many of the projects are continuing via other administrative bodies, and activities at the offices in the Baltic countries now have a somewhat greater focus on co-operation with Russia than they did before.

Global events reached Nordic shores in February when Copenhagen was hit by two terrorist attacks. The Ministers for Nordic Co-operation, who met shortly after the attacks, stated that there was a need for a more active joint commitment to democracy, inclusion, and security in the Nordic Region. The Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers rapidly

developed a cross-sectoral programme focusing on countering extremism and making life in the Nordic countries safer for everyone. Activities within the framework of the Co-operation Programme for Democracy, Integration, and Security will begin in 2016.

Global challenges relate not just to security, but also to climate and environmental threats, and to finding sustainable solutions to these. During the year, the Nordic countries and the Nordic Council of Ministers positioned themselves strategically in this area, focusing specifically on solution models. At the international Arctic Circle conference in Reykjavik, the Nordic Council of Ministers drew attention to creative innovations that utilise natural materials to boost sustainability in the fashion industry. The Arctic is a key focus area in Nordic and global climate policy.

Climate policy in 2015 reached its peak in December, at the UN's climate conference in Paris. This was the first test of the strength of Nordic branding and positioning, with results that were nothing short of outstanding. The Nordic pavilion's programme at COP21 provided great visibility not only for the top Nordic political messages in the areas of climate and energy, but also for the Nordic Council of Ministers as an organisation and the Nordic Region as a whole. The pavilion was also a natural, effective hub for Nordic delegates, and so can justifiably be said to have greatly benefited the overall objectives for Nordic political co-operation.

In 2015, the Nordic Council of Ministers also implemented the first phase of its modernisation programme. The reform programme was launched in order to best position the organisation to realise the new vision of the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation – "Together we are stronger." The main objective of the reform programme is to develop more policies under Nordic auspices, and to strengthen ministerial co-operation for the benefit of Nordic citizens.

Although there is still much to do before all of the objectives are achieved, results can already be seen in the form of greater political involvement, increased co-operation on international issues and EU affairs, and better dialogue between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has also simplified the structure of governing documents, while the budget has become more transparent and contains clearer priorities. Similarly, the Nordic Council of Ministers has put more emphasis on fostering a more efficient working and decision-making culture throughout the organisation.

Since 2014, the Nordic Council of Ministers has been conducting strategic reviews of various policy areas with the objective of revitalising Nordic co-operation and challenging it to develop a range of effective joint solutions. The health review is now complete. In addition, the labour market review will be completed in June 2016, and in 2017 a review of co-operation on energy will begin.

The purpose of the next phase of the reform programme is to increase the various contributions the organisation makes to Nordic governments, businesses, and civil society in order to develop what we call the “Nordic advantage”. For example, in 2015 the Nordic Council of Ministers was tasked with developing a prime ministerial initiative outlining Nordic positions of strength that could feasibly be exported beyond the Region.

Freedom of movement within the Nordic Region is, for most of our citizens, the most visible advantage brought about by Nordic political co-operation. Nevertheless, this movement is not without its complications. The Nordic Council of Ministers’ online service Hello Norden has the specific objective of facilitating freedom of movement for citizens within the Nordic Region. In 2015 more than a million people got in touch with Hello Norden and received responsive, expert assistance with issues concerning moving to or working and living in a Nordic country other than their own.

There is strong political dialogue between our countries and a vested belief in common values. The structures and networks we have laboured over for decades are invaluable and continue to go from strength to strength. The Nordic countries are in a perfect position to develop their co-operation further, even in challenging times. The vision of the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation endures – together we are stronger.

Copenhagen, 1 July 2016

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dagfinn Høybråten', written in a cursive style.

Dagfinn Høybråten
Secretary General
Nordic Council of Ministers

1. Management's status report

1.1 Visibility

1.1.1 *Joint branding and positioning*

The UN climate conference COP21 in Paris in early December resulted in a new global climate agreement. In addition to being a success for the climate, the conference was also the first concrete example of the implementation of the Nordic branding and positioning strategy adopted by the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation in the autumn of 2014.

The Nordic Council of Ministers had its own pavilion at COP21, which was well attended by representatives from the Nordic countries and the rest of the world. The pavilion became a hub for many politicians, including ministers, as well as for numerous media representatives. More than 50 events, including workshops and talks, were held in association with the pavilion. The various events attracted nearly 2,000 visitors, with more than 3,000 people tuning in to online streaming from the events.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' active presence at COP21 provided the Nordic Region with a good platform for showcasing Nordic strength in green technology and climate adaptation, and for demonstrating that it is more than possible to maintain a welfare state while pursuing an ambitious green transformation. The Nordic Council of Ministers' activities also provided an opportunity to highlight the Nordic Region's breadth and strength with regard to competitive energy solutions, ambitious emissions reduction targets, and multifunctional climate solutions, all while achieving economic growth. At the same time, COP21 provided an opportunity to market the Nordic Region as a brand by showcasing it as a model for climate-friendly solutions.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' commitment at COP21 focused on two main themes: energy and the environment. With regard to energy, the aims were to convey the message of 100 years of Nordic energy co-operation, to showcase the Nordic Region as a pioneer in decoupling (i.e. ending the correlation between economic growth and increased energy consumption and emissions), and to raise awareness of the fact

that the Nordic Region is 25 years ahead of the rest of the world in terms of CO₂ intensity in electricity generation.

With regard to the environment, the primary message related to the value and significance of long-term climate goals, to the role of the Arctic both as the “canary in the coal mine” and as an element of the global climate, and to Nordic leadership.

The activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers during the climate conference and the ancillary events held in or adjacent to the pavilion were well received by politicians, negotiators, and the media.

1.1.2 Focus on Arctic issues

The title of the vision of the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation agreed in February 2014 is “Together we are stronger”, and this same vision applies to Nordic co-operation on the Arctic. Since 1996 the Nordic Council of Ministers has worked with Arctic issues on a target basis. The focus has been on the environment from the very start, and this focus remains today, despite current co-operation on the Arctic covering a broader range of challenges and opportunities.

Interest in the Arctic has increased and become global over the past decade. It’s no longer just the Arctic countries that are stakeholders in the region. Even countries far away from the Arctic, and organisations that co-operate on issues relating to the Arctic, have a considerable and active interest in the region. In this context, the exchange of facts, knowledge, and expertise is absolutely essential, and this presents a platform for raising the visibility of the Nordic Region.

For this reason, the decision for the Nordic Council of Ministers to participate actively in the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik in October 2015 – a huge event that attracted 1,700 registered participants – was a natural one. The presence of the Nordic Council of Ministers was testament to the significance of the Arctic agenda for Nordic co-operation. It was also a successful cross-sectoral event for the international branding of the Nordic Region.

1.1.3 Sustainable Nordic Welfare

The Nordic welfare model is strong in all the Nordic countries, but even the strongest of models must adapt to more economically challenging times and demographic changes. For this reason, in 2013 the Nordic Council of Ministers embarked on a three-year programme – Sustainable Nordic Welfare. The programme has resulted in new knowledge and

innovative solutions, and provided inspiration for the renewal and improvement of welfare.

Common to all Sustainable Nordic Welfare projects is that they demonstrate how co-operation provides considerably better solutions to shared challenges.

The three-year programme has shown, for instance, how vocational training can reduce youth unemployment, how welfare technology can future-proof the health and social care sectors, how we can continue to provide world-class medical treatment (and treatment in highly specialised areas), and how shared Nordic access to information can provide essential knowledge in efforts to combat growing inequality.

The programme offers important knowledge about how the Nordic countries can future-proof the Nordic model, while the results and experiences from the last three years are meant to inspire even more joint Nordic projects in the welfare sector.

1.2 International engagement

1.2.1 Programme for Democracy, Inclusion, and Security

2015 was yet another year blighted by terrorism, in both the Nordic Region and elsewhere. The terrorist attacks in Copenhagen on 14 and 15 February cost several people their lives and cannot be seen as isolated incidents. In recent years, the Nordic countries have been subjected to a series of terrorist attacks directed against the democratic Nordic way of life, the Nordic community, and the openness that is characteristic of our Nordic societies.

The attacks are often carried out by those who do not see themselves as part of society. If exclusion spreads, the risk of radicalisation increases, which in turn can lead to violent political and religious extremism, with catastrophic consequences. Such a situation creates insecurity among those living in the Nordic Region and concerns all Nordic countries. This threat to democracy is one that must be stopped.

In light of this, in 2015 the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation embarked on a programme for Democracy, Inclusion, and Security (DIS) under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The objective is to map, develop, and support relevant Nordic efforts that prevent and combat radicalisation and violent extremism.

Within the framework of the DIS programme, in the coming years the Nordic Council of Ministers will, among other things, co-finance relevant

Nordic initiatives and involve key stakeholders in localising, developing, and disseminating the best Nordic solutions for the benefit of the Nordic Region and the rest of the world.

1.2.2 Continued co-operation with Russia

In January 2015, the Russian Ministry of Justice decided to include the Nordic Council of Ministers' Russian office on the list of NGOs considered as "foreign agents" in Russia. The decision led to the Nordic Council of Ministers shutting down its international engagement activities indefinitely at its information offices in St Petersburg and Kaliningrad. Certain low-intensity activities are continuing at the offices, but the offices cannot pursue projects or offer information services in the current situation.

Nevertheless, Nordic co-operation with Russian partners is continuing with the same focus as before on the environment, democracy, education, creative industries, young people, and culture. In 2015, work continued with activities including co-operation on journalism and higher education and research, as well as on parliamentary co-operation.

Co-operation with the Baltic countries also continued and was expanded, with priority being given to Nordic projects that focus on supporting balanced Russian-language media in the Baltics.

One result of the Baltic co-operation is that the Russian-language television channel ETV+ began broadcasting in Estonia in September. The Nordic Council of Ministers is co-financing the television channel with a view to giving the Russian-speaking minority living in Estonia access to alternatives to Russian state television, which is often the foremost source of news for the country's Russian-speaking population.

The co-operation also includes advanced training in investigative journalism for Russian-speaking journalists in Latvia, and training in media analysis and source critique for Russian- and Polish-speaking young people in Lithuania.

1.3 Freedom of movement

1.3.1 Record number of barriers to freedom of movement removed

In 2015, efforts to break down barriers to freedom of movement under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers' freedom-of-movement council were more successful than ever before. The objective of the freedom-of-movement council is to resolve between five and ten barriers to freedom of movement per year. Ten of the identified barriers were broken down in 2015.

Labour market partners play a key role in efforts to facilitate freedom of movement and growth in the Nordic Region. In the spring, a business conference focusing on this was held at Børsen in Copenhagen.

Prior to the conference a working group was formed with representatives from labour market partners in Denmark led by the chairman of the freedom-of-movement council, Ole Stavvad. The aim was to identify, prioritise, and compile a list of barriers to freedom of movement in the Nordic Region that inhibit growth, and to propose solutions to these. Following the conference, the partners sent a letter to the Nordic prime ministers containing 15 identified barriers to freedom of movement that were presented at the conference.

1.3.2 More than a million visitors to Hello Norden

Hello Norden is the Nordic Council of Ministers' information service that provides assistance to citizens in order to facilitate and support mobility between the Nordic countries. Hello Norden's website at www.norden.org gives people concrete assistance with issues relating to moving to or working and living in a Nordic country other than their own.

The number of visits to Hello Norden's website increased by 12% to a total of 1,012,140 visits in 2015. This indicates a high level of mobility in the Nordic Region and an increasing need for information and guidance. Hello Norden and freedom-of-movement-related information services are, therefore, an effective tool in realising the Nordic Council of Ministers' vision for freedom of movement within the Nordic Region.

In addition to Hello Norden, there are the regional freedom-of-movement services: Øresunddirekt between Denmark and Sweden, Grensetjänsten between Norway and Sweden, and Nordkalottens Grensetjeneste between Finland, Norway, and Sweden. They attracted 531,000 visits to their websites and were contacted by 44,700 people

in 2015. To further streamline information activities and freedom-of-movement reports in the Nordic Region, the secretariat to the freedom-of-movement council has formed the so-called LOTS-Gruppen (Nordic Solution-Oriented Duty Co-ordinator). The network serves as a stepping stone between Hello Norden and the regional freedom-of-movement services.

Hello Norden and the other, regional freedom-of-movement information services are especially important to Nordic freedom-of-movement activities and act as the strategic frontline of the freedom-of-movement council. They record all potential barriers to freedom of movement and report these to the secretariat to the freedom-of-movement council and the Nordic freedom-of-movement database.

1.4 Innovation

1.4.1 Nordic Council of Ministers seeks solutions for the elderly

The Nordic societies face major challenges as their populations age. Forecasts indicate that the proportion of Nordic citizens aged over 65 will increase from the current 25% to around 40% by 2040. Such an increase will also result in growing demand for health-care and social-care services for the elderly, as well as for those who have a physical disability or chronic illness.

These challenges are shared by all of the Nordic countries, hence why the five Nordic capitals are now co-operating with the Nordic Council of Ministers to find new solutions. This co-operation comes in the form of The Nordic Independent Living Challenge, which was launched by Nordic Innovation in early 2015.

The aim of the project is to develop better solutions for independent living, i.e. developing innovative solutions, tools, and other aids that will enable Nordic citizens to live in their own homes for longer.

The competition was launched in February 2015 in all five Nordic capitals and is aimed at all stakeholders in the industry, such as welfare enterprises, inventors, start-ups, etc. The organisers expected around 150 proposals, but received an overwhelming 415 ideas, which were whittled down to five in December.

In the spring of 2016, the five finalists will have the opportunity to test and develop their ideas and solutions in the Nordic capitals. The winner, who will receive NOK 1 million (almost DKK 800,000), will be chosen in June 2016.

1.4.2 Nordic Council of Ministers persistent on chemicals

In 2015, the Nordic Council of Ministers maintained a visible presence in the debate on the effects of chemicals. This was achieved by way of two current initiatives relating to the combination effects of different chemicals and the economic consequences of endocrine disruptors.

During the year the Nordic Council of Ministers published a report in which different approaches to measuring the combination effects of chemicals were examined. Although the combination effects of chemicals can be potentially very dangerous, and despite several chemicals often being used together, the requirements to which the chemicals are subject (e.g., EU legislation) are based on the effects only of individual chemicals. The Nordic Council of Ministers' report *Combining exposure scenario information for mixtures with combination effects* made a powerful contribution to the debate about legislation in this area.

In addition, the Nordic Council of Ministers' report *The cost of inaction: A socioeconomic analysis of costs linked to effects of endocrine disrupting substances on male reproductive health* was regularly used in 2015 to draw attention to the economic consequences of endocrine disruptors in humans. The annual cost to society of endocrine disruptors is conservatively estimated to be DKK 270 million in the Nordic countries. This is an estimated total and may in fact be considerably larger.

1.5 Finances

The Nordic Council of Ministers' activities are pursued through eleven councils of ministers. Each council of ministers interprets Nordic co-operation within its own strategies and programmes, for which funds are budgeted and allocated. The Nordic budget is therefore divided among the different councils of ministers, and the annual report presents the sum of the councils of ministers' activities.

The total net expenditure of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2015 totalled DKK 932 million, with income totalling DKK 951 million. The net surplus for the year is therefore DKK 19 million. This surplus consists

primarily of obsolete project funding that was not used within the three years stipulated by the finance regulations.

Liquidity came under some strain in 2015, partly due to the early start to project activities as a result of modernisation initiatives aimed at project activities.

When funds that are budgeted and allocated are not used during the budget year, these funds are considered to be non-appropriated. Non-appropriated funds for the year amounted to DKK 17.6 million, which corresponds to 1.9% of the annual budget. Of these funds, approximately DKK 4.5 million pertain to projects in Russia which were wound down on account of the political situation. Excluding the funds returned from projects in Russia, non-appropriated funds correspond to 1.4% of the annual budget.

The annual report for 2015 is hereby submitted.

Copenhagen, 1 July 2016

Secretary General
Dagfinn Høybråten

Head of Department
Kari Metliaas

2. Budget 2015 – follow-up of the budget compromise with the Nordic Council

Political negotiations between the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers on the council of ministers' proposed budget took place in the autumn of 2014. These resulted in the following changes/clarifications in the budget for 2015:

Following the budget reform, the Nordic Council shall be involved in the budget process at an earlier stage than before.

As part of the reform of the Nordic Council of Ministers, it is now specified in the Financial Regulations that the Nordic Council has the opportunity to air its views on the budget before a decision is made on the budget. In practice this means that the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation invite the Nordic Council to discuss the priorities of the budget before the size and allocation of the budget are adopted. In 2015, the Danish Minister for Nordic Co-operation held regular meetings with the Nordic Council on the budget, with the first meeting on the 2017 budget being held in October 2015.

Reducing food waste remains a priority for the Nordic Council of Ministers. A total of DKK 2.4 million is earmarked for this purpose, of which DKK 400,000 falls under item 1-8007 (Bioeconomy) to provide knowledge about and to find innovative solutions to reducing food waste.

The DKK 2.4 million for 2015 was used to continue with the second phase of the following three projects that will help to reduce food waste:

- Looking at selected foods to find out more about food waste (where this occurs in the chain and its extent) and to support efforts to define food waste.
- Efforts regarding date-labelling of food.
- Control and management of food stores (how food controls are ensured without these becoming too difficult to manage).

Work on phase three of the projects will continue in 2016. Efforts to reduce food waste have otherwise been integrated with work in relevant areas relating to the bioeconomy.

Arctic co-operation will remain a priority and there will be an increase in the budget for this in 2015, which will also take into account the Danish presidency programme's focus on "The Blue Arctic".

DKK 8,716,000 was set aside for the Arctic co-operation programme in 2015, which was used for the following thematic priorities: population, sustainable business development, the environment, nature, and climate, education, and skills development.

Additionally, DKK 2,538,000 is set aside in the budget item "The Blue Arctic" for 1) supporting maritime safety in the Arctic by way of a joint Arctic maritime portal and digital tool, and 2) creating a platform for sharing knowledge, and developing a shared Nordic/North Atlantic protocol for mapping and monitoring the biodiversity and vulnerability of the seafloor.

This corresponds to a total of DKK 11,254,000 for Arctic co-operation in 2015, which is an overall increase on 2014.

Continued work on New Nordic Cuisine in a new phase by setting aside DKK 894,000 to boost strategic networking among key institutions. Additionally, the Danish presidency will focus on, e.g., New Nordic Cuisine within the framework of the "Values" programme (item 1-8010).

A total of DKK 907,000 (equivalent to DKK 894,000 after price adjustments) was allocated to continued efforts on New Nordic Cuisine in 2015.

The steering committee for New Nordic Cuisine was preparing three projects in 2015 that will continue into 2016 and help to boost strategic networking among key organisations: the Nordic food contest, New Nordic Cuisine in the Nordic public sector, and the branding of the Nordic Region as a tourist destination through its cuisine. In addition, there is a focus on how New Nordic Cuisine can be better integrated into Nordic co-operation on the food sector more generally. New activities are being co-ordinated by way of the Danish presidency's activities relating to New Nordic Cuisine and the activities of the forthcoming Finnish presidency.

The emphasis in item 5-6610 is that co-operation on fishing will focus on the development of coastal communities, Arctic areas, and the importance of challenges such as a change in the spread of key commercial species, including pelagic species in the North Atlantic. In addition, the Danish presidency will focus on, e.g., increasing the sustainability of resource consumption in the Northeast Atlantic within the framework of the Growth programme.

Headed by the Faroe Islands, in 2015 Nordic co-operation on fishing focused on growth in the blue bioeconomy in the Northeast Atlantic and the Arctic. Especially relevant in this respect is the phrase “all ashore” and the development of conditions for macro-algae culture in the Nordic Region. Moreover, the fishing sector profiled the development and innovation of seaweed as a food in co-operation with local small producers in Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Denmark. The report *Allocation of fishing rights in the Northeast Atlantic* was published in 2015. The report debated the distribution of fishing rights, in particular for pelagic stocks, and was drafted by the Nordic Marine Think Tank for co-operation on fishing.

Investment in the bioeconomy is a key element in efforts pertaining to green economic growth and sustainability. The goal is to minimise waste in the value chain and pressure on the environment, and to maximise the benefits of the value chain within the bioeconomy. Another goal is to make the next generation aware of the importance of green growth and sustainability, and to focus on food safety and climate change.

Green growth is a fundamental concept in the Nordic Council of Ministers’ work with the bioeconomy. The aim is to reap greater value from the same level of resources or less. The NordBio programme of the Icelandic presidency has boosted the focus on the optimal use of raw materials, including minimising/eradicating waste in production and consumption. In addition, the Nordic Council of Ministers’ work with the bioeconomy in the Baltic Sea region focuses on resource efficiency and optimal benefit along the value chain. Furthermore, the main objective of the Arctic bioeconomy project is to increase local benefits in the value chain.

Further clarification of the objectives for biodiversity under budget item 8-3311 (environmental sector working groups) to include:

- that the Nordic terrestrial ecosystems have a good environmental status
- that a good balance between conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems, and rural, cultural, and urban environments is a resource that is secured for the welfare, well-being, and outdoor activities of the Nordic population.
- that the work helps to ensure that the objectives of both the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity will be met.

The overall objective of the Terrestrial Ecosystem Working Group (TEG) is to promote the good environmental status of ecosystems. This manifests itself in a variety of project activities. In 2015 the group continued efforts to follow up on the Aichi targets of the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) focusing on the restoration of damaged ecosystems (Aichi target 15). During the year, TEG worked to highlight the value of a good environmental status in healthy ecosystems, such as its acting as a buffer against natural disasters. Another field of TEG's work was to ensure the conservation of forests with a high protection value in the Barents region.

In 2015, TEG conducted activities relating to the valuation and pricing of cultural landscapes to ensure that land management, use, and planning take the value of cultural landscapes into consideration.

During the year, the TEG working group worked on the link between climate and ecosystems. Wetlands and peatlands have proven to be very important as sinks or stores for the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, and as habitats for rare flora and fauna. This was highlighted as part of co-operation within a collaboration with the Climate and Air Pollution Group (KOL), and was also successfully presented at the UN climate summit COP21.

The Nordic Council has maintained its focus on bilateral processes between the countries in an attempt to solve the problem with deposits on recyclables, and the Nordic Council of Ministers is awaiting the outcome of this process.

The Nordic Council was informed in writing of the status of bilateral processes regarding deposits between the Nordic countries in early September 2015 and during the environment ministers' question time on 29 October 2015. The Nordic Council will also be informed of the situation by way of responses to Rec. 17/2015, Rec. 18/2015, Rec. 19/2015, and Rec. 20/2015 on deposits in early 2016.

The Nordic Council of Ministers shall earmark a further DKK 400,000 for HELCOM to implement the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), and for the HAV group and NEFCO to implement projects to improve the environment in the Baltic Sea. Efforts are varied and include analysis, the implementation of innovative solutions, seminars, and development projects.

In 2015, the Nordic Council of Ministers also worked to support the implementation of HELCOM and the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), in particular through the work of the HAV group, which has carried out projects using, e.g., the earmarked DKK 400,000. Among other things, activities have been launched and implemented relating to the establishment of a cohesive network of HELCOM's marine protection areas in the Baltic Sea (ECONET), an evaluation of ecosystem services in Nordic marine areas (Mareco) has been drafted, and examples have been compiled of how descriptions and indicators in the directive for a marine strategy and action plan for the Baltic Sea (HELCOM's BSAP) can be applied.

With regard to marine microwaste, the group has studied the effects of drainage cleaning and pollution levels in marine microwaste, and has produced a film mapping the extent of invisible plastics in the Baltic Sea, which pose a major threat to the sea and to marine organisms. In addition, the group was responsible for a project that developed testing methods to study the degree of sediment pollution in the Baltic Sea, which falls under BSAP, with regard to improving the ecological status of the Baltic Sea.

Even NEFCO is working hard to improve the environment of the Baltic Sea on several fronts, including by way of practical assistance for wastewater treatment and the modernisation of agricultural fertiliser use to reduce the nutrient loading of the Baltic Sea.

Allocation of DKK 400,000 for the Nordic Council prize award ceremony.

MR-K has allocated DKK 300,000 for the Nordic Council prize award ceremony in 2015, and MR-M has allocated DKK 100,000 for the same purpose. The Nordic Council of Ministers sees seminars/meetings for the nominees as an important part of awarding the prize, and it is positive if the Nordic Council of Ministers can contribute to safeguarding these activities and raising their quality.

**Allocation of DKK 1 million to the Nordic Journalist Centre in 2015.
The funds are taken from strategic investments (item 4-2208).**

DKK 1 million is allocated to the Nordic Journalist Centre (NJC) in 2015. The NJC's mission is, among other things, to bring Nordic and North Atlantic journalists together in order to build networks so as to safeguard the Nordic conversation and debate. This has been achieved in part by way of further developing a joint digital community, in which physical on-site courses are replaced by webinars, discussion forums, e-learning, event-based information flows from Nordic activities such as Nordic Council Sessions, and cultural festivals, etc.

Dialogue with the NJC increased during 2015 regarding the need for a visible strategic perspective that focuses on issues initiated within Nordic co-operation. This helps to increase the qualitative information on Nordic issues in the media which, for instance, has resulted in the NJC being tasked with implementing a conference on freedom of expression and journalism in the digital media landscape on World Press Freedom Day (2016).

Until decided otherwise, the Nordic Summer University (NSU) will continue its current level of activity, less the 2.4% savings imposed by NordForsk.

NordForsk financed the NSU's activities during 2015 in accordance with the budget agreement.

The initiation of a study to look at whether synergies and economic benefits exist in a common Nordic library project.

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture (MR-K) conducted a study investigating whether there are synergies and economic benefits in the Nordic library project. The project aims to create a common digital purchasing system between the national libraries of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark primarily for literature and media in non-Western languages. The study found that there are indeed synergies and economic benefits, and MR-K decided to allocate DKK 1 million to the project in 2016 on this basis.

Children and young people are a priority in the Nordic Council of Ministers' support for film and television productions through its co-operation body the Nordisk Film & TV Fond.

According to the statutes of Nordisk Film & TV Fond, projects aimed at children and young audiences are prioritised. In 2015, Nordisk Film & TV Fond supported NOK 19,785,000 worth of projects aimed at children and young people, equivalent to 26% of its total funding. Funding was allocated as follows:

- Fiction (cinema and television) – 39 projects supported, of which 14 were aimed at children and young people
- Documentaries – 20 projects supported, of which 4 were aimed at children and young people
- Distribution/dubbing – 35 projects supported, of which 9 were aimed at children and young people

Budget funds for 2015 are allocated to concretise Nordic co-operation on the recommendations in Bo Könberg's report on future Nordic co-operation on health, including combating increasing antibiotic resistance. In addition, an annual meeting is held on One Health (antibiotic resistance in veterinary and human medicine).

In 2015, the Nordic Council of Ministers budgeted a total of DKK 5,243,000 for addressing and implementing the report's proposals. In 2015, the Nordic Council of Ministers also decided to allocate the equity remaining following the closure of the Nordic School of Public Health (NHV) to the Nordic Council of Ministers for Health and Social Affairs (MR-S) for investing in public health within the broad fields stated in Bo Könberg's report. These funds are expected to be made available to MR-S in early 2016.

In 2015, the Nordic Council of Ministers adopted a declaration on the need to combat antibiotic resistance through strengthened Nordic co-operation. By way of the declaration, the Nordic Council of Ministers for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MR-FJLS), and the Nordic Council of Ministers for Health and Social Affairs (MR-S) agreed to establish a One-Health strategy group. The group is expected to be formed in 2016 and will promote the exchange of best practice and secure the efficient use of Nordic resources in the field of resistance. It will be tasked with drafting further proposals for how Nordic co-operation can support ongoing global efforts to combat antibiotic resistance by way of the EU, WHO, FAO, and OIE, etc.

A Nordic expert meeting on antibiotic resistance was organised by the Danish presidency in October 2015.

Evaluating what can be done to prevent Nordic children and single parents falling into poverty.

Child poverty has been highlighted in several areas of the Nordic Region, and the Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK) is focusing on the exclusion of children and young people as part of its current action plan. NORDBUK therefore gave the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues (NVC) the task of promoting and contributing to the building of knowledge in the field of child poverty and of facilitating the dissemination of new efforts to improve the living conditions of children in the Nordic Region. The project has also developed digital stories created by young people, and a concluding conference was held in December 2015 in which some of these young people took part. The project's final report is due in 2016.

The preparation of a new cross-sectoral programme and reinvigorated efforts in the fight against human trafficking following on from last year's positive experiences.

In 2015, the Nordic Council of Ministers decided to launch a new cross-sectoral programme in the fight against human trafficking. Subsequently, during the period 2015 to 2018 and in co-operation with partners in the Baltic region, the Nordic Council of Ministers will implement a programme to combat human trafficking. The programme consists of specific initiatives that will help to combat human trafficking, to prosecute traffickers, and to support and protect victims. The idea is to involve specialists and professionals working to fight human trafficking in the Nordic countries, the Baltics, and in Northwest Russia. The initiative will help to bolster co-operation and networks among the various participants in the region, to create platforms for the exchange of knowledge and experiences, and to help to disseminate and implement guidelines that can strengthen efforts to combat human trafficking. The 2015-2018 programme will continue to develop the regional efforts in the fight against human trafficking, which the Nordic Council of Ministers has been conducting since 2001 in co-operation with partners in the Baltic region.

The Nordic Council of Ministers will evaluate the conclusions from the Consumer Conference once these are available, and will explore the potential for further work in the field of non-toxic living.

In 2015, through the Nordic Chemical Group (NKG), the Nordic Council of Ministers worked on the areas highlighted in the recommendations from the conference. The NKG is actively working on projects related to REACH and supports the OECD's development of test methods, particularly for endocrine disruptors. Several of the NKG's subgroups are working on endocrine disruptors, combination effects, nanomaterials, information on hazardous substances, and the identification and prioritisation of severely hazardous substances, as well as on improving information on hazardous substances.

Through this co-operation, the Nordic countries are influencing the development and implementation of EU legislation on chemicals. This is being achieved by developing background material and guidance, and by developing methods for evaluating efficacy, exposure, and risk assessment and management, and for the supervision and monitoring of chemicals. In 2015, the Nordic Chemical Group also had a number of relevant projects related to consumer information.

3. Main figures and key figures

Selected main and key figures of the Nordic Council of Ministers for the last four years:

Table 1: Main figures and key figures

	2015	2014	2013	2012
Expenditure				
Annual budget (DKK thousand)	931,782	955,215	986,726	961,472
Income: (DKK thousand)				
- Denmark	183,636	197,844	217,319	210,882
- Finland	142,318	153,565	169,568	169,142
- Iceland	6,427	6,595	6,822	7,226
- Norway	289,227	288,287	285,536	277,340
- Sweden	296,573	295,824	295,281	286,182
- Cost of salaries, interest, and other income	32,958	38,644	20,692	26,777
Total	951,139	980,759	995,218	977,549
Net surplus for the year				
Income less expenditure	19,357	25,544	8,492	16,077
National contributions – by country				
- Denmark	20.0%	21.0%	22.3%	22.1%
- Finland	15.5%	16.3%	17.4%	17.8%
- Iceland	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%
- Norway	31.5%	30.6%	29.3%	29.2%
- Sweden	32.3%	31.4%	30.3%	30.1%
Surplus as at 31 December				
Non-appropriated funds	17,623	16,405	32,772	35,245
Cash and cash equivalents	182,655	124,971	204,587	199,984
Equity	-100,643	-94,456	-111,508	-103,923
Miscellaneous				
Non-appropriated funds as a % of the annual budget	1.9%	1.7%	3.3%	3.7%
Operation of the Secretariat as a % of the annual budget	8.3%	7.9%	7.6%	7.6%
Number of institutions	13	14	15	15
Number of people employed under Nordic conditions	97	95	101	95
- of whom women	57	60	64	64
- of whom men	40	35	37	31

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