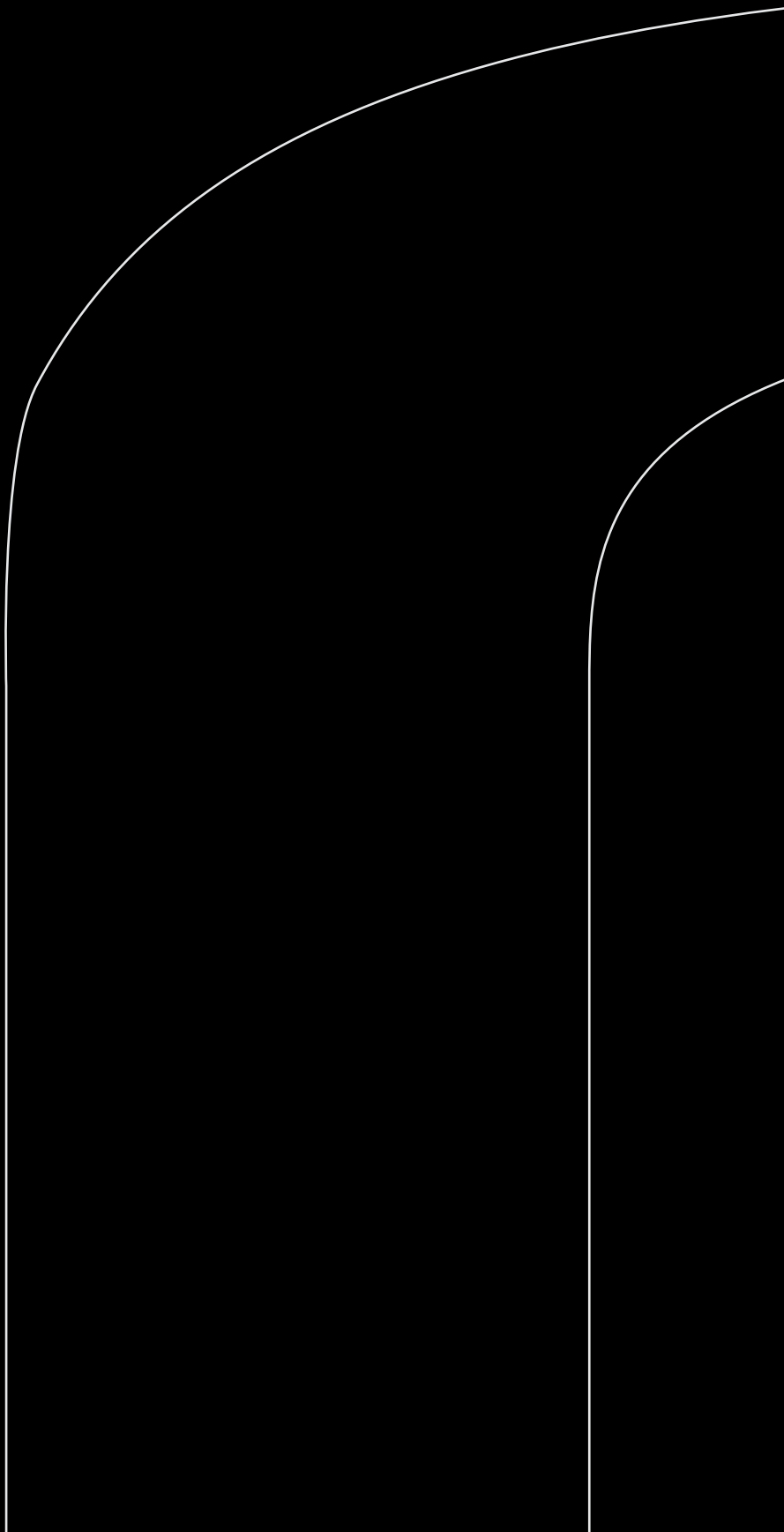




Concentrating Our Strengths

Programme for Swedish Presidency of
the Nordic Council of Ministers 2008



Concentrating Our Strengths

Programme for Swedish Presidency of
the Nordic Council of Ministers

ANP 2007: 741

© Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen 2007

ISBN 978-92-893-1566-1

Print: Scanprint A/S, Århus 2007

Design: Kjell Olsson

Copies: 1,000

Printed on environmentally friendly paper

This publication can be ordered on www.norden.org/
order. Other Nordic publications are available at
www.norden.org/publications

Printed in Denmark

Nordic Council of Ministers

Store Strandstræde 18

DK-1255 Copenhagen K

Phone (+45) 3396 0200

Fax (+45) 3396 0202

Nordic Council

Store Strandstræde 18

DK-1255 Copenhagen K

Phone (+45) 3396 0400

Fax (+45) 3311 1870

www.norden.org

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, Green-land, 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.

Contents

- 7** Foreword
- 8** The Nordic Region
concentrates its strengths
- 13** Competitiveness
- 17** Climate
- 21** Creativity
- 25** Co-ordination



Foreword

We have much of which to be proud in the Nordic countries. Economic prosperity and a welfare model that have stood us in good stead. Fertile soil for innovation, research and entrepreneurship. Citizens of this part of the world also enjoy democracy, human rights, freedom of movement and an advanced degree of gender equality. However, we also face a number of common challenges. In 2008 it is Sweden's turn to hold the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. We will use the year to focus our Nordic strengths on those joint challenges, and on sectors where we think the Nordic countries have the most to gain from working together.

We need to make the Nordic Region as a whole more competitive in a globalised world, and to work together to eradicate exclusion from the labour market in our countries. We need to work more closely together to find a joint response to the climate question and co-operate on research and culture. Last but by no means least, we need to sharpen and focus Nordic co-operation.

Working with our neighbours, forging contacts and exchanging information are all proud Nordic traditions. Close partnership and popular support are, and have long been, sources of strength for our countries when they take part – individually or as a region – in European or world affairs. We look forward to an effective partnership with our neighbours in 2008, and to achieving our common goals. Historically, we have succeeded in solving many shared problems and achieved great progress when we have acted together. We are convinced that continued close Nordic co-operation will benefit our countries, their citizens and the world around us.



FREDRIK REINFELDT

The Nordic Region concentrates its strengths

Growth in the Region is higher than in many comparable parts of the world. Unemployment is low compared with the rest of Europe, and public finances are sound. The Nordic countries top the international charts in many indicators of social progress – e.g. investment climate, information technology, research and education, etc. Alongside our strong sense of regional cohesion, these achievements provide an advantageous foundation on which to stand together and face the great challenges ahead.

We need to adapt to ever-tougher global competition if we are to maintain and develop the welfare upon which our Region is built. Climate change illustrates the need to adapt our societies in an environmentally responsible manner. We must retain the option of maintaining our central characteristics, while at the same time remaining open to outside influences. At a meeting in June 2007, the Nordic prime ministers agreed guidelines for closer Nordic co-operation on globalisation issues. The Swedish Presidency intends to implement concrete initiatives in this area.

It is in the Nordic Region's interests to develop Baltic Sea co-operation, e.g. on issues that affect competitiveness and the environment, inside the EU, in relation to the EU and to Russia, and especially in the Nordic–Baltic co-operation between the eight EU/EEA countries. This will build an effective platform for facing the challenges of globalisation. It is also important to continue developing the co-operation that the Nordic Council of Ministers has established with North-west Russia and the other Adjacent Areas.

The Swedish Presidency will emphasise Nordic co-operation on breaking down the exclusion of certain social groups and individuals from civic participation, education and training, housing and, above all, the labour market. A society that offers all men and women equal opportunities in their working and private lives is a common goal shared by all Nordic countries. Therefore, the continued integration



of a gender and equality perspective into Nordic co-operation is a priority. A children's and youth perspective is another fundamental element.

Priorities

The programme is divided into four main themes: Competitiveness, Climate, Creativity and Co-ordination. The headings cover over-arching objectives and activities. The sectoral programmes provide more detailed descriptions of the specific priorities, and outline which of the various ministerial councils have responsibility for them.

Competitiveness

A central objective of the Presidency is to strengthen the position of our countries in the face of increasingly fierce international competition. The prime ministers' initiative to promote closer Nordic co-operation on globalisation issues will be followed up. Efforts will also be made to raise the profile of the Nordic Region. Co-operation in areas such as applied research and small-scale production will be promoted. Greater mobility between the Nordic countries is a high priority. In the field of education and training, the Presidency will support forms of co-operation that improve quality.

Climate

Recent quantifiable climate changes clearly demonstrate the need to build a sustainable society. The Nordic Region is in a strong position to pioneer work on combating climate change. The Presidency will focus on climate change and on joint Nordic initiatives in the run-up to an international agreement on climate change in 2009. Nordic co-operation on supporting measures to cope with climate change in developing countries and growth economies will also be promoted.

Creativity

Synergies in the fields of education and training, research and culture are central aspects of Nordic co-operation. Creative and entrepreneurial research environments will be encouraged and supported.

The promotion of creativity in children and young people is an important objective for schools. Improving the exchange of information between the Nordic countries will also be beneficial.

Co-ordination

Properly functioning Nordic co-operation needs to be closely linked to European co-operation. Much is to be gained from developing co-operation with regional players such as the Barents Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Arctic Council, and by delineating the internal division of responsibilities. The role of the Nordic Council of Ministers within a rejuvenated Baltic partnership will be defined. The Nordic Council of Ministers will adopt new guidelines for co-operation with the Baltic States and North-west Russia in 2008. A new Arctic co-operation programme for 2009–2012 will also be adopted.

There is also a great need for closer co-ordination between Nordic and national institutions, and closer co-operation between the national authorities in the Nordic countries.

The Swedish Presidency will also continue to work on issues taken up by previous presidencies. It is vital that the process of reforming and modernising Nordic co-operation should continue, not least in relation to the Council of Ministers' institutions and other bodies. The work on equality will be followed up, as will the action plan 'Design for All', which aims to improve social access for people with disabilities. The Nordic strategy for sustainable development will also be reviewed during 2008.

The Swedish Presidency will engage in regular dialogue with parliamentarians from the Nordic Council and the 2007 Finnish Presidency.

Nordic co-operation draws much of its strength from its popular support and our shared tradition of open, democratic societies. As such, co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the NGO's, not least the Norden Associations, is highly significant.

Further information on the Swedish Presidency is available at:
www.Norden2008.se



Competitiveness

The consequences of the increasing globalisation of the international economy are becoming ever clearer. The Nordic Region is well placed to cope with globalisation, but we need to work more closely together and make the most of the advantages enjoyed by the Region.

The Swedish Presidency will implement the globalisation initiatives announced by the Nordic prime ministers in June 2007. In spring 2008, representatives from governments, business, universities, the research sector and civic life will be invited to a Nordic summit to discuss the challenges posed by globalisation.

An important step towards improved competitiveness in our Region lies in enabling the greatest possible freedom of movement. We must remove the obstructions that make daily life more difficult for cross-border commuters and people who want to work, study or settle in another Nordic country. It is equally important to promote freedom of movement for business and consumers. A great deal is to be gained from the SOLVIT network, which helps business by linking up national authorities and other stakeholders across Europe, and helps people to deal with differing national regulations.

A highly educated, competent workforce is essential if our countries are to gain ground in international competition. The Swedish Presidency will highlight Nordic co-operation on issues affecting the quality of education and training.

In terms of demographic development, the proportion of the working-age population in employment must increase. For one thing, it is important to make it easier for young people and immigrants to establish themselves in the labour market. Combating exclusion will therefore be a priority during 2008.

The Presidency will also address issues of quality assurance in vocational education and training, and promote freedom of movement for skilled labour through mutual recognition of national qualifications.

The social safety nets established in the Region over the years have many similarities, but also several important differences. In a global context, the well-established Nordic social-security systems constitute a competitive advantage and a source of strength. However, these systems now face numerous challenges, not least because of ageing populations. The Presidency will follow up the 2007 study of how the Nordic welfare models perform in terms of labour-market participation.

A strong workforce and skills base throughout the Region will further enhance competitiveness. It is important to ensure strategic cross-border co-operation between the Nordic countries and, where appropriate, with the Baltic States. This will supplement national strategies and create opportunities to develop properly functioning, sustainable labour markets. Greater access to the labour market, partially through regional enlargement and more widespread use of IT, is essential for our global competitiveness.

The Presidency will seek to promote closer collaboration between the Council of Ministers and the border regions. The collation and analysis of statistical data about cross-border movement will be improved. The work of the border regions to promote freedom of movement will be given greater priority and visibility, and will be followed up.

Research and innovation are also important means of improving international competitiveness, but further action is needed to raise the Region's profile within European research and development. The Presidency will prioritise activities that bolster the innovation system and support innovation clusters.

The Presidency will follow up on ongoing studies of Nordic co-operation on venture capital.

Further development of the Nordic electricity market is urgently required if it is to be efficient, borderless and sustainable, and if it is to operate under proper competitive conditions.

Tourism is a growing industry, and the Nordic countries have much to offer our visitors. Strategic co-operation is needed to improve our competitive position in foreign markets. It is therefore important to encourage and improve partnerships in the tourism sector.

The New Nordic Food project aims to promote progress in a number of areas associated with food, such as gastronomy, tourism, regional development and healthy eating. Sweden intends to highlight this project in a number of ways in 2008.

The Region has made real progress in its efforts to achieve an equal society, and this has contributed to the economic development and competitiveness of the Nordic countries. Equality will continue to be a high priority.

TO DO IN 2008

- Follow up on the globalisation initiative launched by the Nordic prime ministers in June 2007.
- Arrange the first Nordic globalisation forum, attended by representatives from politics, business and civic life.
- Follow up on the Nordic Investment Bank's renewed investment in the competitiveness and marine environment of the Baltic Sea Region.
- Arrange a seminar on the Nordic electricity market.
- Improve co-ordination and communication between border regions.
- Adopt a revised programme for co-operation on regional policy for 2009–2012.
- Promote co-operation between national tourism bodies in order to market the Nordic Region as a single tourist destination.
- Organise a conference on enterprise as a driving force in Europe, addressing obstacles to mobility, cross-border co-operation, simplification of regulatory regimes, and tourism.
- Organise New Nordic Food project seminars and other activities.
- Organise a seminar on competitive rural commerce.



Climate

The ever-increasing rate of climate change in recent years illustrates the need for sustainable societies. The Nordic countries are at the forefront of highlighting environmental problems and proposing solutions. The Swedish Presidency will focus on Nordic environmental and climatic issues and implement measures that will set a positive example, e.g. by achieving the climate objectives set by the EU. The joint Nordic institutions that operate in the environment sphere, e.g. the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) and the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) have important roles to play in environmental co-operation.

Climate change is by definition a global issue. National or Nordic measures are insufficient. Wide-ranging, long-term international partnership is required. Sweden will encourage joint Nordic input into the international climate-change agreement in 2009.

The Nordic Region also has the potential to play an active role in international climate-change measures beyond 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol expires. Nordic co-operation can help draw up effective control measures and develop technical solutions. Together, we are capable of spreading understanding of the environmental and social effects of climate change.

The Presidency coincides with the International Polar Year (IPY), 2007–2009. International polar research is essential for gaining an understanding of the global climate. Sweden will promote Nordic co-operation on polar research and encourage greater regional support for the IPY.

For a society to be sustainable, the production and use of fossil fuels must be reduced. The Presidency will promote further Nordic knowledge exchange in this area, as well as closer co-operation on the role played by agriculture and forestry in improving the production and cost-efficiency of bio-energy.

Combating climate change also requires the adaptation of land for alternative purposes. The Presidency will launch initiatives designed to develop co-operation on the processing of forestry products and to address other agricultural and forestry questions. Issues affecting the cultural environment and landscape will be examined from a climate perspective.

Nordic co-operation on energy is based on the 2006–2009 action plan, which focuses on three areas: energy markets; sustainable energy systems; and international co-operation. Co-operation on current EU issues and the ongoing development of the Nordic electricity market will be accorded high priority, as will the energy sector's contribution to reducing environmental impact. In 2008, work will begin on formulating a new action plan for 2010–2013. The new plan will be adopted in 2009.

Nordic environmental co-operation has long been based on action plans. The current one will run until the end of 2008. The Swedish Presidency will negotiate a new environment action plan for the period 2009–2012.

Sweden will also take the initiative to identifying ways in which the Region can help developing countries to adapt their societies in the face of climate change and to develop in a sustainable direction.

TO DO IN 2008

- Agree on a new environmental action plan for 2009–2012.
- Start work on a new action plan for Nordic energy co-operation for 2010–2013.
- Organise a seminar on wind power.
- Organise a meeting of institutions that fund polar research in the Nordic countries, with a view to extending Nordic collaboration beyond International Polar Year.
- Hold a Nordic conference on climate issues, in the context of the cultural landscape and environment.
- Organise a conference on the consequences of climate change for forestry.



Creativity

Creativity is emphasised in several core areas of Nordic co-operation: culture; education; research and innovation; children's and youth issues, etc. Cultural and educational exchanges play an important role in sharing knowledge and reinforcing ties between the Nordic countries and autonomous areas. Co-operation in this area has undergone major changes in recent years. The Swedish Presidency will continue to drive this important process forward, with a view to making co-operation even more efficient and visible.

The aim of Nordic co-operation on culture and media is to promote artistic activity and stimulate the creativity of children and young people. It will also look at the economic conditions faced by the creative community, and address media issues that affect children and young people.

The right of children and young people to participate fully in cultural life, their right to freedom of expression and their right to express their creativity are prescribed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and constitute the top priorities in the Nordic strategy for children and young people. There is a great deal of interest in this area in the Nordic Region, and many schools are already striving to make creativity an integral part of their teaching.

Much of children and young people's creativity is expressed during their leisure time, with the help of new media and digital technology and without the presence of adults. The challenge lies in respecting children's right to be creative, and their right to freedom of expression and information, while at the same time protecting them from potentially detrimental or harmful material. Increasing Nordic information-exchange programmes on this issue would be of great value.

The significance of the creative community for growth and employment is under discussion at the moment, both in the individual Nordic countries and at EU level. The Nordic countries should be working more closely together on these questions, particularly in the light of

closer co-operation on globalisation issues. Sweden will encourage Nordic co-operation on various aspects of the economic conditions faced by the creative sector. One theme to be taken up will be the future funding of the cultural sector.

Gender equality in education and training is a major issue. As far as school results and educational progress are concerned, it is characteristic for all the Nordic countries that the boys underperform, and this gender gap seems to be growing in the long term. However, although women may be well trained for their jobs, it can be more difficult for them to assert themselves on the labour market. Sweden will raise this issue during its Presidency.

Investment in entrepreneurship is important if we are to encourage the growth of new business. Stimulating interest in enterprise among school pupils and equipping young people with business competencies helps to achieve this objective. The Presidency will examine Nordic school-exchange programmes and look at other opportunities for collaboration.

In linguistic terms, the Nordic Region is characterised by both diversity and affinity. It is important to reiterate the general principle that communication in official Nordic circles should be in the Scandinavian languages, with Finnish and Icelandic also occupying prominent positions. A range of programmes also promotes minority Nordic languages. The 2006 Language Declaration adopted by the education ministers constitutes the foundation for a comprehensive, long-term and effective language policy. Various linguistic issues will be in focus during 2008.

TO DO IN 2008

- Hold a conference on culture in schools.
- Organise Nordic exchange programmes about entrepreneurship in education.
- Organise a Nordic seminar on gender, progress in education and the labour market from a lifelong-learning perspective.
- Organise a conference about young people's media consumption and habits.
- Follow up the education ministers' decision on a Nordic-language declaration.







Co-ordination

The Nordic countries may at times have adopted different approaches to their relations with the EU and with Europe as a whole. The Nordic Region, with the exception of the Faroe Islands and Greenland, is part of the EU/EEA and therefore also a part of the European inner market. Decisions made by the EU affect the everyday life of people in the Nordic countries. Therefore it is both natural and necessary to look at Nordic co-operation from a broader European perspective. The Swedish Presidency will develop the Nordic Council of Ministers' adaptation to and co-ordination with the EU countries. There are also grounds for doing this from a Nordic-Baltic context in specific areas. Many of the issues that concern Sweden's Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers during 2008 will also arise in the context of its EU Presidency in autumn 2009.

Developments in the Arctic Region have an impact on the rest of the world, especially Europe. All of the Nordic countries are so-called Arctic states. Nordic co-operation affords positive opportunities to raise Arctic issues in the EU and with other international bodies.

A number of forms of multilateral regional co-operation exist in our part of Europe. It is important to find appropriate forms of collaboration and to divide responsibilities in the most efficient manner possible. In addition to holding the Presidency in 2008, Sweden also chairs Nordic meetings at foreign- and prime-minister level (N5). Estonia chairs the corresponding meetings in the Nordic-Baltic sphere (NB8). Sweden places great value on N5 and NB8 co-operation. Lively and beneficial NB8 partnerships also exist, and provide mu-

tual benefits, at both ministerial and senior official level in other policy areas.

The special geographic conditions in the West Nordic Region require efficient co-operation in areas such as business. Contacts and networks with North Atlantic partners from outside the Nordic Region should be encouraged.

Following the expansion of the EU and the running down of transitional arrangements in the business sector, Nordic co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is entering a new phase of ever-closer co-operation in a range of strategic areas. The Council of Ministers' co-operation with North-west Russia is broad and constitutes a significant part of their activities and total budget. For some years now, the Council of Ministers has also supported ЕНУ, the Belarusian exile university in Vilnius. New action plans for co-operation with the Baltic States and North-west Russia will be adopted in 2008 and will come into force in 2009.

During 2008, the activities of the Council of Ministers' offices in the Baltic States and Russia will be reassessed. Decisions will be made on the activities of these offices from 2009 onwards.

It is important that EU directives are incorporated into the national statute books in the Nordic Region in a way that creates and upholds greater equality before the law. To that end, the Nordic justice ministries have worked efficiently together on legislation for many years. The Presidency will encourage and publicise this form of co-operation, and will also promote co-ordination and information exchange in the negotiation process.

Efforts to bolster the rights of the child will be made in collaboration with the Council of Europe. Sweden will hold the Presidency of the Council of Europe from May to November 2008. During its parallel presidency, Sweden will promote co-operation on equality and disability issues between the two bodies.

The Council of Baltic Sea States resolved to reform itself following a June 2007 meeting of foreign ministers in Malmö. The ministers also welcomed the special EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. It is important that the work on the Baltic strategy, particularly in the area of environmental issues, should be harmonised with the strategic priorities of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

EU market regulations require that efforts be made to co-ordinate Nordic methodologies and programmes. The new EU machinery directive means that more than 600 European standards must be



re-examined. There is a joint Nordic outlook on these issues. By co-ordinating input and sharing the workload, the Nordic countries will improve the chances of their points of view making an impact. Similarly, there already exists highly significant Nordic co-operation on standardisation and safety in the consumer product sphere.

Sweden will also highlight the role of international financial institutions. Many of these are important players in the Baltic Sea Region and the Adjacent Areas, and have significant capital at their disposal. The Presidency will promote a strategy that empowers the Nordic countries to make greater use of their collective influence in multilateral financial institutions. The main objective is to promote economic growth and employment that is compatible with sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region and neighbouring countries.

It is also important to promote co-ordination between Nordic institutions and national authorities and bodies. Similarly, co-operation between national authorities in the Nordic countries needs to be improved. One area in which this is important is ensuring that citizens are aware of their rights and obligations while working or staying for extended periods in a neighbouring Nordic country. One step in this process is the establishment of a Nordic social-security portal. This work is expected to be concluded in June 2008.

A high-priority issue in the justice sector is improving the efficiency of existing co-operation in the areas of criminal law and penal systems. The ministers for justice have commissioned a study of the need and prerequisites for closer co-operation between police and prosecution services. The Swedish Presidency will make the conclusions public and follow up on them.

Nordic police must co-operate in areas other than solving crime. For example, joint policing with officers from another Nordic country is one simple method of preventing and detecting crime in border communities. Sweden will launch initiatives to examine this issue.

By international standards, the Nordic countries have come far in terms of social equality for people with disabilities. Yet much remains to be done. Sweden will improve collaboration on disability policy between Nordic and national bodies and stakeholders. In this regard, a particular area of focus is the position of people with disabilities in the labour market.

TO DO IN 2008

- Organise a conference on Arctic issues, e.g. in an EU context.
- Adopt a new Arctic co-operation programme for 2009–2012.
- Propose a strategy to improve the relationship with international financial institutions active in the Baltic Sea Region.
- Adopt a new strategy for the Council of Ministers' co-operation with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia.
- Determine the future direction of the Council of Ministers offices in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia.
- Organise two seminars in collaboration with the Council of Europe: one on the theme of children's participation in and influence on society, and one on violence and other attacks on children. The seminars represent one step towards a new Council of Europe programme on the rights of the child.
- Organise a conference in collaboration with the Council of Europe to debate disability policy action plans and objectives in the light of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.
- Organise an experience exchange/conference on the efficient administration of labour markets and welfare.
- Organise training on gender mainstreaming for chairpersons of the various committees of senior officials and the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers.
- Develop co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the following regional organisations: the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Council and the Arctic Council.

Photos. Cover: © Moodboard (outside), Per-Erik Adamsson/Greatshots (inside).

P. 6: Frederic Cirou/PhotoAlto; p. 9, 12: Ingram; p. 16: Copyright/photo Johan Ylitalo/Image Bank Sweden;
p. 20: Copyright/photo Theresia Parsby/Image Bank Sweden; p. 24: Copyright Rubberball; p. 28: unknown.