

Concentrating Our Strengths

Summary of the Swedish Presidency of
the Nordic Council of Ministers 2008

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Nordic cooperation

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.

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Foreword

Sweden has held the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2008.

An ambitious programme was presented ahead of the Presidency called 'Concentrating our strengths' and focusing on four themes: competitiveness, climate, creativity and coordination.

Contacts between our Nordic countries during the year have been many and successful. Cooperation and relations have been characterised by friendship and a desire to further strengthen the Nordic region as an area of dynamic growth.

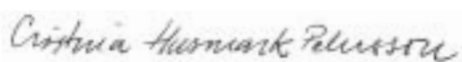
A review has begun of how cooperation can be better adapted to the challenges we face with regard to globalisation and climate change.

Bringing benefit to the Nordic region is about making life easier for people. For this reason, increasing integration and reducing the number of border barriers have been high on the agenda this year.

Interest in and commitment to the Nordic region and the Nordic community have increased markedly.

The strength of Nordic cooperation is demonstrated when we succeed in turning words into action. It is therefore important that our programme for the year can be easily evaluated.

I hope that during the Swedish Presidency in 2008 we have been able to demonstrate the importance of close Nordic cooperation.



Cristina Husmark Pehrsson
Minister for Nordic cooperation



Competitiveness

The goal under the theme *Competitiveness* has been to strengthen the position of our Nordic countries in the face of growing international competition.

To achieve this, this year Sweden, in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers, held the first Nordic Globalisation Forum in Riksgården. The event was part of the follow-up and further development of the prime ministers' globalisation initiative.

Within the framework of the common Nordic globalisation drive, an excellence in research initiative was started. The focus of the initiative is climate, energy and the environment. The programme encompasses and draws together research and innovation within several sectors and thereby contributes to the creation of a Nordic innovation and research area. The timetable for the programme covers 2009–2013 and involves public funding of almost half a billion Swedish kronor.

A seminar was also organised as part of the Swedish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers on the development of a borderless Nordic electricity market, with a focus on the importance of improving conditions for investments and harmonising regulations associated with the electricity market.

A number of tangible border barriers have been resolved in 2008, primarily in the social sector. Through a new regional policy cooperation programme, the Nordic countries have established a framework and the main orientation for regional policy cooperation over the next few years. The emphasis will be on continuing measures to reduce border barriers and regionally differentiated enterprise policy. It will also focus on an improved climate and energy policy via more active physical planning and development of infrastructure that is sustainable in the long term.

The Nordic countries reached an agreement on the preparation of joint Nordic statistics on border regions. The aim is to ensure that the basis for our public planning is not limited to national statistics alone.

To facilitate cross-border mobility for individuals and companies, the Border Barrier Forum has helped kick-start joint Nordic efforts to produce common Nordic rules for such matters as the authorisation of electricians.

Nordic cooperation has also helped create a Nordic search engine for known border barriers and a Nordic social insurance portal. It is also now possible for citizens of other Nordic countries to receive a Swedish personal identity number.

Via a conference on the subject, the Swedish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers launched a discussion on strategies for meeting the demographic challenge, both in the Nordic region and from a broader EU perspective. A conference on a similar theme will be held at European level in the autumn of 2009 during the Swedish Presidency of the EU.

Increasing cooperation within the tourism sector was another important area. Joint profile-raising and marketing of the Nordic regions in, for example, Asia (as part of Expo Shanghai 2010) and North America have been the focus. Moreover, the Nordic countries have contributed to a joint initiative in the areas of innovation and product development and the development of common analysis and follow-up models.

In connection with this, efforts have also been launched to increase the visibility of Nordic technological development via a pilot project to promote Nordic innovation initiatives in Asia.

IMPLEMENTED 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 coordination and communication between border regions.
- ✓ Adopt a revised programme for cooperation on regional policy for 2009–2012.
- ✓ Promote cooperation 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 cooperation, simplification of regulatory regimes, and tourism.
- ✓ Organise New Nordic Food project seminars and other activities.
- ✓ Organise a seminar on competitive rural commerce.



Climate

The goal under the theme *Climate* has been to work for the continued development of a sustainable society with the primary objective of combating the ongoing climate change.

To achieve this we have taken a decision within the framework of Nordic cooperation on a new environmental action programme for the next few years, with the emphasis on climate and air, the sea and coastal areas, biological diversity, ecosystem services and sustainable consumption and production. In the course of the year working groups have been set up to identify how the Nordic countries can cooperate on management and planning with regard to the seas.

A new action plan has been adopted for Nordic energy cooperation, with the aim of achieving a more sustainable energy supply. Sweden has also led a Nordic project on the sustainable production of bioenergy from agriculture and forestry to strengthen the Nordic bioenergy approach within the framework of EU work.

A working group was set up this year with the primary task of preparing and assisting in the implementation of inquiries, projects, relevant meetings and conferences to help achieve good results at the Climate Conference in Copenhagen in 2009.

A seminar was held on the need for continued expansion of the use of wind as an energy source in order to achieve global climate and energy objectives.

A conference on the consequences of climate change for forests was held and a declaration on sustainable forestry was adopted. Discussions were also held on forest regeneration and carbon storage in a changing climate.

The Nordic Council of Ministers, in conjunction with the European Commission and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), held a conference on the effects of climate change on fish stock development and the fisheries industry.

Furthermore, Sweden, together with the other Nordic countries, held a conference on the latest research concerning the effects of animal protection on food quality. The conference was well attended and its conclusions formed the basis of the Vaxjö Declaration, adopted on 26 June. The Declaration will form the basis of a Nordic consensus in the EU/EEA and other international forums where animal protection is discussed, for example the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Council of Europe, concerning the importance of proper animal protection and the close connection between high levels of animal protection and a high quality of food from animal products.

As part of the Swedish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers a conference was also held on entrepreneurship in rural areas. The conference focused on foodstuffs, food and the importance of culinary experiences as vectors of culture for rural areas, and the extent to which these affect where people choose to live. One of the results of the conference was that the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences was tasked with organising a major Nordic research conference in this field.

A cross-sectoral conference was held this year looking at issues to do with climate, renewable energy, the cultural landscape and art. Particular emphasis was placed on achieving cooperation between different sectors of society in order to produce new ideas and working methods.

A conference was held on young people's opportunities to participate in and influence the climate debate. The Swedish Presidency also started initiatives to increase children's and young people's knowledge of and respect for nature and its resources.

IMPLEMENTED IN 2008

- ✓ Agree on a new environmental action plan for 2009–2012.
- ✓ Start work on a new action plan for Nordic energy cooperation 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

The goal under the theme *Creativity* has been to raise the Nordic region's profile as a leading area in the creative industries, to promote creativity among children and young people and to encourage and promote entrepreneurship and creative research environments.

A strategy for a creative Nordic region was adopted to increase the visibility of Nordic art and culture on the global stage and increase cooperation and dialogue between the Nordic region and the rest of the world. The culture and business sectors have begun to cooperate to raise the Nordic region's profile as a leading area in the creative industries. This is also one of the aims of the proposal presented by the Council of Ministers this year for a cultural partnership within the Northern Dimension. The Nordic culture ministers also agreed on a Nordic-Baltic exchange programme for artists with their Baltic counterparts.

The report on coexistence and cultural complexity and the subsequent international conference on the same theme were the basis for a comprehensive debate on the challenges and opportunities for cultural diversity and the dialogue between cultures in the Nordic countries.

Within Nordic cooperation we have also prioritised issues to do with the participation of children and young people in cultural life and public debate, and the right to engage in creative activities. The conference on culture in schools helped increase the exchange of knowledge and experiences on an issue that is extremely topical in the Nordic region. The same is true of the conference on children's and young people's media consumption and habits. The conference raised the positive effects on the creativity of children and young people, cross-border contacts and new identity-building forms of expression. The problems of increased vulnerability and exposure in the new media landscape were also discussed.

A conference on the theme of gender, educational success and working life was held this year. The conference focused on how and why gender affects educational outcomes, choice of studies, teaching and learning, and what is required to break gender patterns.

As part of the Presidency we also held a seminar on the sexual health of young people from a gender perspective, focusing on how different actors handle gender equality issues in this respect.

Organisational measures were also taken and additional resources allocated to strengthen the mutual understanding by people in Nordic countries of each other's languages. Work has begun to follow up on the 2006 language declaration and discussions are underway on the adoption of a new language convention.

IMPLEMENTED 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.



Coordination

The goal under the theme *Coordination* has been to further develop and intensify cooperation with other regional actors and to achieve better coordination between Nordic and national institutions, and between the national authorities in the Nordic countries.

To achieve this, new guidelines have been drawn up for cooperation over the next few years with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and north-western Russia. The cooperation focuses primarily on areas related to globalisation that are of importance to all concerned. Discussions were also initiated with the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) to intensify cooperation in areas such as trafficking in human beings.

Sweden has also continued the efforts started by previous presidencies to develop and hone Nordic cooperation. Further progress goes hand in hand with the cooperation review that Sweden has initiated. The review aims to adapt cooperation to current needs and ensure that cooperation can also overcome new challenges brought about by globalisation and climate change.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has also been a key actor in ensuring that it is financially viable for the European Humanities University (EHU) in Vilnius to continue operating, through the creation of a trust fund.

Sweden organised an Arctic Conference in Greenland, in conjunction with the European Commission, with the aim of increasing knowledge of conditions in the Arctic. The Nordic Council of Ministers also adopted a new multi-annual Arctic Cooperation Programme in order to help develop and improve the quality of life for Arctic populations and to increase initiatives to counter climate change in the Arctic.

Sweden also led efforts to draft a declaration on a sustainable Nordic region, which is backed by the Nordic countries and the autonomous areas. The declaration's aims are to attempt to check climate change, to maintain and improve the environment and to promote dynamic economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Three seminars were also held within the framework of Nordic cooperation and in conjunction with the Council of Europe, on the theme of Building a Europe for and with Children. The first seminar highlighted the possibilities for meaningful and sustainable child participation in community development. The second seminar looked at intensifying cooperation to combat violence against children. The third seminar focused on shaping guidelines for child-friendly justice.

Furthermore, the Nordic countries held a Nordic seminar, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, on participation and influence for children and young people with disabilities. The purpose of the seminar was to exchange experiences of the work that is ongoing in the Nordic countries to broaden the range of technical aids available to disabled people.

Sweden and the Nordic Council of Ministers have also worked to strengthen gender equality in the Council, for example by providing training in gender mainstreaming for those chairing Committees of Senior Officials and for officials in the Council Secretariat.

Together with the other Nordic countries, Sweden has taken measures to develop Nordic police cooperation. This includes clarification of the conditions for joint police operations. The heads of the Nordic national police services have produced a strategy to strengthen cooperation to combat child pornography offences and other internet-related child abuse.

Finally, we have worked to ensure that Community legislation is implemented in a similar way in all of our countries.

IMPLEMENTED IN 2008

- ✓ Organise a conference on Arctic issues, e.g. in an EU context.
- ✓ Adopt a new Arctic cooperation 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' cooperation 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.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Develop cooperation 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.



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Nordic cooperation involves Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, and the autonomous areas of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers rotates each calendar year among the five Nordic countries.



REGERINGSKANSLIET

Ministry for Foreign Affairs Sweden

Further information on
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