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The Nordic Region pointing the way forward

Programme for the Danish Presidency of
the Nordic Council of Ministers 2010





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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 three autonomous territories: the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and promotes a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Co-operation seeks to promote Nordic and regional interests and values in a globalised world. Common values strengthen the position of the Nordic Region and make it one of the most innovative and competitive regions in the world.

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Foreword

The Danish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2010 will face challenges as well as opportunities.

The Nordic countries face the same challenges of globalisation, climate change and economic crisis, and the Presidency will seek collective solutions that serve the whole Region well and make the most of our opportunities.

The theme of globalisation, as both a challenge and an opportunity, recurs throughout “The Nordic Region pointing the way forward”. The programme is a natural extension of the Nordic globalisation work launched by the prime ministers at their 2007 meeting in Punkaharju, Finland. The Danish Presidency seeks to provide further impetus to this process.

The Presidency wishes to maintain the position of the Nordic Region as a leading innovative region. This will involve a renewed effort to promote cross-border freedom of movement for the benefit of citizens and companies alike, so that the Region remains an attractive place in which to live and work. It will continue to be a green region, taking a lead in meeting the challenges of climate change and environmental protection. Last but not least, the Nordic Region will generate value and achieve results that have an international impact.

The international economic crisis set much of the Nordic agenda in 2009, and is expected to shape events in 2010 as well. One priority for the Danish Presidency will be to develop effective measures to limit the consequences of the crisis, secure our future and strengthen the basis for economic progress in the Nordic Region.

We will build upon the experience we have already gained, and at the same time keep our eyes fixed firmly on the future. We have the courage to invest strategically and offensively, so that Nordic co-operation continues to generate added value for our citizens and binds our nations even more closely together.

The Danish Presidency looks forward to continuing close co-operation with the other Nordic governments, as well as with the Nordic Council and with Nordic NGOs. It gives me great pleasure to present this visionary programme, which is the result of close collaboration between the three parts of our realm: the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Denmark.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Lars Løkke Rasmussen'.

Lars Løkke Rasmussen

The Nordic Region and globalisation

Nordic co-operation enjoys a solid base of popular support, which provides the Region with a strong starting point from which to face the challenges of the future. The overarching, multi-sectoral aim of the 2010 Presidency will be to consolidate and develop the Nordic response to globalisation. The financial crisis highlighted the need for the Region to exploit the opportunities arising from globalisation, as well as to meet its challenges. Solidarity and collaboration between the Nordic countries has never been more vital. The Council of Ministers' budget has been reprioritised to ensure that funding will be available for the necessary measures in this area. Globalisation and building a sustainable Nordic Region, in which equality plays a key role, are consistent themes of the Danish Presidency.

The Nordic Region and the financial crisis

In the last year, the international agenda has been dominated by a financial crisis of almost unprecedented severity. Its consequences include falling productivity and rising unemployment around the world, and many governments have been forced to intervene to stave off the worst and most immediate repercussions. Comprehensive rescue packages have been drawn up for the financial sector. The impact has varied from country to country in the Nordic Region, as have the reactions, which have included a significant easing of fiscal policy. The crisis is expected to continue and therefore will remain an important issue in 2010. As a consequence, the Presidency will focus on discussing experiences of the crisis and ways of coping with it, in order to soften the short-term blow, pave the way towards consolidation of our economies and ensure a solid foundation for renewed growth in the Nordic economies.

A sustainable Nordic Region

All aspects of Nordic co-operation will continue to incorporate a sustainable development perspective. The Presidency will follow up on the prime ministers' October 2008 declaration on establishing a sustainable Nordic Region. Economic and social development must be compatible with protecting the environment and combating climate change. All citizens must enjoy good living conditions, no matter where in the Region they live.



Equality is vital

Despite its geographic size, the Nordic Region has a small population base with limited potential for growth. If the Nordic countries are to continue to compete in a globalised world, this potential must be utilised to the full and everybody must be involved. Denmark will promote gender equality, including equality for people from different ethnic backgrounds. It is vital that the equality perspective is integrated into all areas of co-operation.

The work of the Danish Presidency is based on three pillars: “The Nordic Region in the world”, “Inside the Nordic Region”, and “Preparing the Nordic Region for the future”.

The Nordic Region in the world

The shared Nordic culture and values present opportunities to co-ordinate work and to enhance the Region’s impact in international affairs. The Council of Ministers aims to create synergies and increase the visibility of the whole Region through co-operation based on common interests with other regional organisations, particularly the EU, the Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Barents Council.

Key international player

The Nordic countries play a collective role on European and international stages. They will, for example, chair several international institutions in the near future, providing opportunities to promote Nordic values.

The traditional close and effective Nordic co-operation in the UN and the World Bank will continue, e.g. on elections to the Security Council. EU co-operation has assumed greater importance for the Region. Three countries are members, while Norway and Iceland maintain close relations with the Union through the EEA. To achieve greater synergies, the Presidency will increasingly integrate an EU perspective into the work of the individual Councils of Ministers. Uniform implementation of EU directives will prevent new barriers to freedom of movement arising in the Region.

Leading Nordic roles in international organisations

The European Union

2009: Sweden

2012: Denmark

The Arctic Council

2006–2009: Norway

2009–2011: Denmark

2011–2013: Sweden

**The Council of
the Baltic Sea States**

2010–2011: Norway

The Barents Council

2009–2011: Sweden

The EU's Baltic Sea strategy seeks to improve co-operation on climate change, the environment, infrastructure, business and safety at sea throughout the Baltic Sea Region. The strategy directly affects four of the five Nordic countries and plays an important role in addressing the challenges facing the Baltic. During the Danish Presidency, the Nordic Council of Ministers will continue to make an active contribution to the implementation of the strategy. It is particularly important to secure greater participation by the Baltic republics in this work.

Nordic embassy partnership in Athens

The four Nordic embassies in Athens have worked increasingly closely together in recent years. Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden co-operate on culture and on combating illegal immigration. They also offer help to Nordic citizens in Greece who find themselves in need, e.g. as a result of natural disasters.

The Danish embassy has also assumed responsibility for coming to the aid of Icelandic citizens during major crises.

The Stoltenberg Report on closer Nordic co-operation on foreign and security policy identifies tangible responses to some of the challenges facing the Nordic countries. For example, it recommends closer co-operation between Nordic embassies, following the example from Athens. The 2010 Presidency will continue to follow up on the decisions reached by the foreign ministers at their June 2009 meeting in Reykjavik.

The Presidency will also continue to encourage closer co-ordination of Nordic input in adjacent areas, particularly the Arctic Region. In addition to the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, Denmark also holds the Presidency of the Arctic Council in 2009–2011. This provides opportunities to achieve synergies – e.g. in the Arctic, where Greenland will play a central role – without duplicating existing work. The Nordic Region also supports the “Arctic Spatial Data Infrastructure”, an important part of the ongoing development of the Arctic Council's work.

The Presidency will profile and extend collaboration with the Region's neighbours to the west, as per the report *“The West-Nordic Region in Nordic Co-operation”*. It will also evaluate the potential for bolstering the role of Nordic Atlantic Co-operation (NORA) in co-ordinating and impro-

ving the effectiveness of relations with the Region's neighbours to the west and in the North Atlantic. This is particularly relevant to the new environmental, economic and social challenges facing North Atlantic coastal communities as a result of globalisation and climate change.

The 13 proposals contained in the Stoltenberg Report:

1. Nordic Stabilisation Task Force
2. Nordic co-operation on surveillance of Icelandic airspace
3. Nordic maritime monitoring system
4. Maritime response force
5. Satellite system for surveillance and communications
6. Nordic co-operation on Arctic issues
7. Nordic resource network to protect against cyber attacks
8. Disaster response unit
9. War-crimes investigation unit
10. Co-operation between foreign services
11. Military co-operation on transport, medical services, education, materials and exercises
12. Amphibious unit
13. Nordic declaration of solidarity

Climate and environment

Sectoral programmes and activities will address geographic areas and issues such as the Arctic, the North Atlantic and the Baltic, culture, research, climate change, energy, fisheries and aquaculture, food safety and food supply, education and coastal and regional development.

Intense negotiations are expected on the implementation of the agreement reached at the COP15 summit in Copenhagen. As with the Kyoto Protocol, it is expected that the content, ratification and implementation of the agreement will necessitate a significant amount of follow-up work. During the Danish Presidency, the Nordic Region will continue to act as a driving force in international climate-change negotiations. The objective



will be to maintain the environmental integrity of the agreement reached at COP15. Ratification and implementation need to follow as quickly as possible, as the first commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol expires at the end of 2012.

The Nordic countries will continue to promote the adoption in 2013 of the UN convention on reducing global mercury emissions. The Nordic Council of Ministers supports international negotiations on the mercury convention.

As 2010 is also the UN deadline for stemming the loss of bio-diversity, the Presidency will evaluate and promote efforts relating to knowledge, communication, forging partnerships and local participation on this important issue. Specifically, Denmark will promote partnerships with business in order to provide better protection for bio-diversity and natural habitats.

Focus on the sea

The Danish Presidency will pay particular attention to the seas in the Region. This perspective will be incorporated into all co-operation in the Arctic, North Atlantic and Baltic, as well as related areas such as culture, research, climate change, energy and the environment, fisheries and aquaculture, food safety and food supply, education, and coastal and regional development. Current forms of collaboration and initiatives, e.g. those under the auspices of the EU, will not be duplicated.

This work will culminate in a high-level conference hosted by the Faroe Islands in October 2010. The conference will monitor progress to date and provide inspiration for new objectives and opportunities for marine-based economic partnership and development, both in the Nordic Region and in collaboration with neighbouring countries in the North Atlantic. The living Nordic tradition of boat-building will play a central role in this project.

The Faroe Islands will chair Nordic co-operation on fisheries in 2010, and will prioritise synergies between the Nordic focus on the sea in 2010, Nordic fisheries co-operation in general and the proposal for a Nordic Year of the Sea in 2012.

Branding

In the globalised economy, competition between the regions of the world is growing fiercer all the time. The Nordic Region has built up a strong



brand that is widely recognised around the world, and the individual countries derive benefit from joint promotion in international markets. The Presidency will further develop its marketing activities as part of the Nordic globalisation initiative, based on the profile adopted by the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation.

Culture is a basic common denominator for the Nordic countries, and so constitutes a crucial part of the Region's international brand. In order to enhance the role of culture in branding work, the Presidency will promote an economic focus on particular cultural activities and joint Nordic promotions. New opportunities for closer co-ordination of networks of national and Nordic cultural institutions, councils, boards, etc. will be investigated. In tangible terms, a number of initiatives will be implemented to put a green Nordic Region, as well as its culture and cultural products, on the world map. The "Culture and Creativity" sub-theme is one example of a new globalisation initiative.

Several major cultural initiatives are already planned as part of the Nordic focus on globalisation, and the Presidency will continue this work. At the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, the Nordic countries will stage a festival of children's films, a conference on food safety, an exhibition of landscape architecture and "Nordic Day", which will focus on sustainable energy solutions. Nordic Energy Solutions will use Nordic Day to showcase the Region's expertise and partnerships, particularly on energy efficiency and sparsely populated areas, and to promote further progress.

The Presidency will also focus on branding Nordic food. The Region will be marketed on the basis of its emphasis on food safety, animal health and welfare, food quality and dynamic culinary traditions. The focus will be on activities that promote the Region's international image as a producer of good, safe, healthy food.

Combating tax evasion

Major international efforts are currently being made to combat tax evasion. As a result of the "Offshore Financial Centres" project, the Nordic countries have signed more information-exchange agreements with offshore financial centres than any other nations have managed. The agreements provide the Nordic tax authorities with access to information about Nordic citizens resident in the countries concerned. The Danish Presidency will continue to prioritise this work.



Inside the Nordic Region

The Nordic countries are all small, open economies, and are therefore vulnerable to shifting international economic conditions – as demonstrated by recent events. It is important that the Region is able to meet this type of challenge and exploit the opportunities presented by globalisation, e.g. by maintaining flexible labour markets and resisting protectionism.

Freedom of movement for citizens and companies

The shared geography, attitudes and culture of the Region must be exploited for the benefit of its companies and citizens. Knowledge, ideas and research need to flow freely between the countries, which means that existing obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement must be removed and new ones prevented from arising. The mandate of the Freedom of Movement Forum expires in 2010. Denmark will seek the renewal and adaptation of this mandate. The Presidency will actively follow up on the Forum's report to the prime ministers at the 2009 Nordic Council Session.

Language fellowship

To a large extent, Nordic co-operation grew out of a cultural fellowship in which language is a central component. The maintenance of the Scandinavian languages as the lingua franca of Nordic co-operation is an important element in the Nordic Language Declaration. The Presidency will make determined efforts, in both the long and short term, to implement the declaration. The Presidency will also promote the teaching and understanding of neighbouring languages. An informal ministerial conference on the Nordic languages, which will be attended by the co-operation and education ministers, is planned for 2010.

Employment policies

The Nordic labour markets must remain attractive and efficient enough to ensure that, in an ever-more globalised world, the Nordic economies will continue to be at the forefront of innovation, competitiveness and inclusion. Attractive, accommodating labour markets will help the Region ensure full employment and provide access to qualified labour. The tendency for the workforce to shrink, due in part to the ageing population, must be countered by the mobilisation of, and skills enhancement for, vulnerable social groups.



Specifically, Denmark will continue to prioritise exchanges of experience and ideas between the Nordic countries on the subject of migrant labour. It will follow up on the Swedish Presidency's focus on integrating vulnerable groups into the labour market by concentrating on how to keep them in work despite current economic and employment trends.

The exchange of experience and ideas on migrant labour will focus on identifying qualifications and competences, and on the retention of migrant workers who possess competences that are in demand. The Presidency will also prioritise the exchange of experience and ideas on how to ensure that guaranteeing the supply of migrant labour does not take place at the expense of proper wages and conditions.

Equality in the labour market

A high proportion of both genders are active in the Nordic labour market. Although this has many positive effects, the market has divided along gender lines, resulting in pay differentials and other inequalities. The evidence strongly suggests that the financial crisis and the pace of globalisation have had a particularly negative impact on traditionally male jobs, e.g. in the manual trades, while staff shortages are common in the public sector in many of the traditionally female jobs, e.g. in the health and care services. This is a particular problem in peripheral parts of the Region, which are dominated by traditionally male occupations such as hunting and fishing. The Danish Presidency will focus on practical measures to motivate and equip men to take on traditionally female roles in order to make the labour market both more equal and more flexible.

Business policies

The financial crisis placed Nordic companies under heavy pressure, partly due to restricted export opportunities. The Presidency will work to establish a new, green Nordic business strategy. It will seek to strengthen the competitiveness of Nordic business and exploit opportunities that arise as a result of climate change. It will also promote Nordic principles of corporate social responsibility and launch specific initiatives designed to improve conditions for innovation.

Consumers

The Nordic countries share the vision of a society based on growth, welfare and effective markets, which provide positive conditions for enter-

prise, consumers and competition. Consumer-protection policies play a central role in achieving this objective, and social trends present new challenges to consumer policy. For example, since 85% of consumer-protection legislation is based on EU regulations, solutions to many of the challenges faced by Nordic consumers also have to be sought at international level.

Consumption patterns have altered in recent years, and the amount of e-commerce has risen sharply – although consumers still primarily purchase in their own countries. European cross-border e-commerce has remained stable at 7% since 2006. Consumers drive the market, including the digital market, so buying and selling online needs to be easy, safe and transparent. Consumers need to have confidence in the products and services offered, no matter where the supplier is located. A common European e-commerce label would increase confidence and boost cross-border trade. The Nordic countries can contribute to the development of such a label at EU level. The Danish Presidency will commission a survey of the structure of current national regulations.

Regional policy

Nordic regional policy focuses on the consequences of globalisation in terms of competitiveness, the environment, climate change, demographic imbalance and increased mobility of labour. The Presidency will examine the challenges facing the urban regions and their role in regional development. It will also examine the role of small and medium-sized towns in rural development, as well as Nordic experience of cross-border projects. In order to improve understanding of EU policies on territorial cohesion, the Presidency will also evaluate the feasibility of a Nordic interpretation of these policies.

It is increasingly difficult for the peripheral parts of the Nordic Region to maintain their population and employment levels, and to ensure welfare and development. As a result of this trend, the Presidency will pay attention to the development potential of sparsely populated areas, including sustainable rural districts.

Health and welfare

The Nordic countries all have well-established welfare systems and strong social sectors. In the globalised economy, it is important both to focus on common characteristics and to draw inspiration from the differences between the systems.

The Danish Presidency aims to enhance the quality and efficiency of the Nordic countries' welfare systems by encouraging them to share knowledge, experiences and developments, particularly in the areas of family policy, adult ADHD, vulnerable young people and youth crime prevention.

As far as health resources are concerned, the 2010 Presidency will focus on preventing lifestyle-related illnesses and developing health-care systems. The twin aims are to position the Region as a leading innovator in these areas and to cope with the impact of globalisation on the health sector.

Co-operation on lifestyle-related illnesses will take place within the context of Nordic globalisation efforts. The Danish Presidency will concentrate its efforts on intervention research, where a lack of knowledge has been identified. The Nordic countries will greatly benefit from joint research in this area.

The trend in all of the Nordic countries is towards more centralised health and hospital services, with fewer and more specialised hospitals. This trend needs to be balanced out by a modern, decentralised health-care system. The Danish Presidency will therefore focus on the description, analysis, comparison and further refinement of the Nordic health-care systems.

Steadily rising global trade and travel activity not only contributes to climate change, but also increases the risks of previously unknown diseases, pollution, etc. The Danish Presidency will focus on the consequences of globalisation and climate change, with particular emphasis on food safety, animal health and animal welfare. It is essential to identify potential threats and to develop specific national and global measures to counter them.

Another priority for the Presidency will be nutrition and health, particularly the ongoing implementation of the Nordic action plan for better health and quality of life through improved diet and increased physical activity. It is important to enable consumers to make informed decisions about food and nutrition, and so implementation and promotion of the Nordic Keyhole label will also be a priority.

In addition, Denmark will focus on improving knowledge of hormone-disrupting substances and their potential effects on human health and the environment, which may stem from exposure to many different substances at the same time, or from exposure to the same substance from many different sources. Both at EU and international level, there is growing recognition of the fact that this problem requires international action, hence the attention that will be paid to it during the Danish Presidency.



Climate, environment and green transport

Innovative ideas and methods designed to meet climate and environmental challenges also present opportunities for improving competitiveness. One of the aims of the DKK 400 million Top-Level Research Initiative (TRI) is to develop and promote sustainable energy and climate solutions in the Region. Multi-sectoral partnerships generate synergies between national development programmes and will establish the Region as a leader in climate change and energy. The Nordic Region must be a green region with green jobs.

Areas will be identified in which it would be beneficial to combine competences in joint initiatives, e.g. the development of large-scale testing and demonstration facilities for green transport solutions based on electricity, hydrogen and fuel cells.

The Danish Presidency will continue work on globalisation initiatives in transport and energy, with the objective of making the Region a green laboratory in which Nordic companies will be able to develop environmentally friendly solutions for the global transport industry. The Presidency will promote strategic partnerships between the Nordic countries and between private and public bodies in order to create a common platform for the development and exploitation of synergies. These partnerships may be in extension of or in parallel with the TRI. Potential investment targets include the intelligent adaptation of electric cars, and more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly energy consumption in marine transport.

Reprioritisation of the Nordic Council of Ministers' budget to focus on globalisation and the funding of tangible initiatives, in this case in the energy and transport sectors, will allow significant funds to be ring-fenced and specific ambitions to be fulfilled.

The Nordic countries are in a unique position to develop and commercialise sustainable energy solutions based on biomass, water, wind and geo-thermal technologies. The Region must aim to be a leader in sustainable energy and energy efficiency.

Under the Danish Presidency, the priorities for Nordic energy co-operation will be to meet the challenges of climate change and provide secure supplies of energy for the whole Region. Particularly high priority will be afforded to activities that meet the triple requirements of economic growth, secure supplies and climate change.

The Presidency will continue work on the development of a single Nordic electricity market with guaranteed supplies. The integration of sustaina-

ble energy into the electricity and heating markets represents an important step towards achieving the EU's sustainable energy targets for 2020. The Nordic countries must work together to ensure strong EU backing for the expansion of the electricity and gas grids in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, as well as for low-carbon energy production in the Nordic Region.

The Presidency will continue to support the Region's traditions of co-operation on technological development, research and energy efficiency. Nordic competences and co-operation will also be used to make further advances in energy efficiency, particularly in relation to sparsely populated areas. The Nordic countries regard co-operation with the Baltic States, through the Baltic energy co-operation body BASREC, to be a vital component of the EU's Northern Dimension.

The Nordic countries have strong competences in environmental technology, sustainable production and consumption. The Region is capable of being a leader in all three areas, especially in times of crisis, by focusing on the environment in a proactive and strategic manner.

Sustainable production and consumption constitute an important basis for developing Nordic business in an environmentally innovative manner. Knowledge of the Region's strengths in sustainable consumption and green lifestyles is therefore an important element in the Nordic globalisation process.

The Danish Presidency will prioritise the Swan, a successful environmental label already familiar to Nordic consumers. The 2007/8 evaluation of the label proved that consumers still consider it meaningful. The environment ministers subsequently recommended an exercise to visualise what form the Swan might take in 2015. The Icelandic Presidency initiated that process and it will be completed during the Danish Presidency in 2010.

Education and research

The Nordic countries need to forge even deeper and closer knowledge partnerships. The Danish Presidency will prioritise world-class education in the Region, with the ultimate objective of attracting, training and retaining the most talented international students and qualified workers. We must do everything in our power to provide the best possible conditions for developing the competences of the most able school pupils and other rising talent.



The programme will also seek to develop exchange programmes in youth education and continue to prioritise the joint Nordic Master's Programme (NMP). If the NMP is to attract the best-qualified students from around the world, it must continue to offer high-quality courses that are firmly entrenched in established research environments.

Lifelong learning and adult education also need fresh impetus if we are to attract and retain qualified workers. In order to improve mobility, work is required on the mutual recognition of qualifications within the Region and the EU. Nordic citizens need to know that their qualifications and competences are valid throughout the Region.

In continuation of the work of the Icelandic Presidency, the education sector will provide support for creativity and entrepreneurship, with the ultimate objective of enhancing entrepreneurial competences in the Region.

Close Nordic research partnerships are a fundamental prerequisite for generating growth, welfare and high employment. The final preparatory stages of the Nordic Top-Level Research Initiative on the climate, environment and energy will culminate in 2010. The Presidency will continue work on improving how Nordic research co-operation is run. This work is expected to produce a range of conclusions and recommendations that can be rapidly implemented at both national and Nordic levels before any major new research projects are launched.

Denmark aims to exploit Nordic talent to the full, and measures will be taken to promote freedom of movement and support researcher mobility. These measures will provide inspiration, serve as a model for European work and help to improve synergies between the work of the European Research Area (ERA) and the Nordic Research and Innovation Area (NORIA).

The European Spallation Source (ESS) in Lund provides a base for improving the infrastructure for Nordic co-operation on research. Its main aim is to help co-ordinate joint Nordic input into European research facilities, but ESS is also capable of helping to upgrade and expand new Nordic facilities.

Culture, climate and nature

Following up on the Icelandic Presidency, Denmark will continue work on the necessary adjustments to the organisation and direction of Nordic cultural co-operation. The major reform launched in 2007 requires further adaptation and consolidation. Globalisation work in the



culture sector will continue on the basis of the co-operation ministers' "Culture and Creativity" initiative and the culture ministers' strategy document "The Creative Nordic Region".

The Presidency will develop a joint Nordic initiative on culture and climate change. Specifically, it will promote the project "Climate & Culture – Global Challenges in the Arctic".



Preparing the Nordic Region for the future

A globalised world presents a range of challenges but also a range of opportunities. If Nordic co-operation is to exploit these opportunities to the full, then the institutional composition of the Council of Ministers must be kept under constant review in order to maximise its effectiveness.

Reform of the Nordic Council of Ministers

The Nordic Council of Ministers was reformed in 2005, and an evaluation of the reforms was conducted in 2008. The Danish Presidency will continue to follow up on the evaluation. One outcome will be a reduction in the number of meetings, although greater attention will be paid to their political content. Following up on the Icelandic Presidency, Denmark will seek to have political priorities reflected more clearly in the budget. It will also seek to involve the Budget Expert Group at an earlier stage of the budget process. The Presidency will work towards a more flexible Council of Ministers, based on a multi-sectoral approach. At present, responsibilities are divided between the 11 Councils of Ministers that make up the Nordic Council of Ministers. However, any given Council of Ministers has the potential to take decisions on matters outside of its core area. The Presidency wishes to utilise this potential more fully in order to guarantee a more flexible response to urgent matters.

The Council of Ministers should concentrate more clearly on visions for the future, prioritisation and political debate. Agreement on many routine issues is already reached at civil-servant level, rendering ministerial discussion more or less superfluous. It should be possible to let civil servants take decisions and for the next meeting of ministers to endorse them. This would be an advantage, not a problem, and would make Nordic co-operation more efficient. As well as allowing such decisions to be made on motions and proposals submitted in writing, consideration should also be given to allowing urgent decisions to be made by the next meeting of any of the 11 Councils of Ministers, irrespective of its core subject area.

The Danish Presidency will encourage and support the principle that the Nordic Council of Ministers' discussions should be more political in nature, e.g. based on input from the Secretary General, including specific proposals for priorities and activities.

Only by regularly re-evaluating how it thinks and works can the Nordic Council of Ministers continue to renew itself and remain politically relevant.







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