





# The New Nordic Region: Innovation and Co- Operation in North Europe

Programme for the Norwegian Presidency of the Nordic  
Council of Ministers 2006

- Summary of the main priorities

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## **Nordic co-operation**

Nordic co-operation, one of the oldest and most wide-ranging regional partnerships in the world, involves Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. Co-operation reinforces the sense of Nordic community while respecting national differences and similarities, makes it possible to uphold Nordic interests in the world at large and promotes positive relations between neighbouring peoples.

Co-operation was formalised in 1952 when *the Nordic Council* was set up as a forum for parliamentarians and governments. The Helsinki Treaty of 1962 has formed the framework for Nordic partnership ever since. The *Nordic Council of Ministers* was set up in 1971 as the formal forum for co-operation between the governments of the Nordic countries and the political leadership of the autonomous areas, i.e. the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

## Main priorities

In order to meet the internal and external challenges it faces, Nordic co-operation must engage in continuous innovation and efficiency gains. The rapid pace of social change throws up challenges to the objective of achieving sustainable development, and places new demands on social welfare provision and care for the environment. Further challenges arise from globalisation, which places new demands on knowledge-based innovation and growth, while internationalisation poses a challenge to the retention of the Nordic identity and cultural sense of community. Changes in the countries around the Nordic Region generate new challenges, as well as opportunities for multilateral co-operation that will be of mutual benefit in the new Europe.

In many ways, it is a new Nordic Region that will confront these challenges. The particular challenge for traditional Nordic co-operation is to keep rejuvenating itself in the light of constant change. At the same time, it is important to guarantee continuity in the work done on priority issues. The Norwegian Presidency aims both to be innovative and to ensure continuity. The Presidency will also seek to balance external co-operation with the Nordic Regions' neighbours with work primarily done to promote closer co-operation internally, within the Nordic Region.

The programme as a whole reflects the breadth of Nordic co-operation. Within the broad range of co-operation, the Norwegian Presidency has opted to focus on the following main priorities:

- co-operation in the North of Europe.
- the Nordic welfare model.
- knowledge, innovation and growth.

The Presidency will also prioritise the continuation of two tasks started during previous presidencies: promoting open borders in the Nordic Region and the continuous renewal and streamlining of Nordic co-operation.

The programme is based on the Nordic strategy for sustainable development.

### Co-operation in the North of Europe

The Norwegian Presidency will prioritise co-operation in the North of Europe. The Nordic Region is an important driving force in regional co-operation with North-West Russia, the Baltic Sea Region, the Barents Region, the Arctic and the North Atlantic. Developments in these areas

are of great importance to the Nordic countries in particular and Europe in general.

The Nordic Council of Ministers will commence a new phase in co-operation with the Baltic States and North-West Russia in 2006, based on new guidelines. As well as fine-tuning regular co-operation between official bodies and political co-operation with the countries around the Baltic Sea, the Nordic countries will also implement a new programme for co-operation with North-West Russia and the Arctic Region in January 2006.

The Norwegian Presidency considers it to be one of its main priorities to get the two programmes off to a good start, and sees this as a way of encouraging even closer co-operation in the northern regions. It will be important to consolidate support for the programme of co-operation with North-West Russia, by encouraging proactive dialogue with the Russian authorities. The St Petersburg area is expected to be a focal point for co-operation but Norway also places great emphasis on developing close co-operation with the Murmansk area. The programme's overall objective is to promote constitutional democracy, the rule of law and economic growth, with the building of networks and knowledge as its main components.

As far as co-operation in the Arctic is concerned, the Norwegian Presidency will prioritise climate change, pollution and sustainable development, with particular importance placed on attention to the living conditions of the indigenous Arctic peoples. There will also be an emphasis on prioritising Arctic initiatives that are of benefit to the West Nordic Region.

The Norwegian Presidency will continue to forge ever-closer relations between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the other councils in the North of Europe: the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Council of the Baltic Sea States. Through dialogue with the presidencies of the other councils, the Norwegian Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers aims to promote co-operation and complementarity in the pursuit of common goals. The way will also be paved for closer practical project co-operation, wherever conditions point in that direction.

The EU's Neighbourship Programme and Northern Dimension play central roles in regional co-operation in the Nordic Region's Adjacent Areas. The Norwegian Presidency will advocate continued close collaboration with the EU on current programmes, and will seek to make an active contribution to the future development of the Northern Dimension in 2006.

To a great extent, tangible co-operation with our neighbours will be described in greater detail in the Council of Ministers' own programmes, as well as in the topics discussed in the Presidency's programme.

## The Nordic welfare model

The basis for the Nordic Region's external relations is the fact that we are of interest as a partner; the Nordic social model, in particular, is often of interest to others. It is therefore important that we continuously exchange experiences at Nordic level about challenges in this area and solutions to key social issues. All societies face the challenge of maintaining a sustainable welfare system for the future and to that end, welfare provision must continually be reviewed and renewed. At the same time, it is both necessary and desirable to make Nordic welfare policy better known outside the Nordic Region.

The Norwegian Presidency will, therefore, pay particular attention to the Nordic welfare model. As the Nordic welfare research programme draws to an end in 2006, various initiatives will be taken to assess the challenges faced by our welfare systems. The Presidency will also accentuate a number of specific challenges facing co-operation, on children and young people, families, gender equality, and social and health affairs.

The Norwegian Presidency would particularly like to commission a study to find out about young peoples' attitudes to the Nordic welfare state. The Presidency proposes to set up a Nordic Youth Panel in 2006, and this will be one of the themes on which the panel will work.

The Nordic social model is based on active democracy, with freedom of association and participation for everyone. The relationship between people and their surroundings has a crucial impact on the potential for participation, especially for people with disabilities. In order to improve accessibility for everyone, the Norwegian Presidency will therefore be pressing for the Nordic action plan 'Design for All/Universal Design' to be followed through. The Presidency also wants to focus on children with disabilities and their families, so that these families have the same opportunities to live active lives and take part in society and the labour market as everybody else.

In terms of health and social services, the Norwegian Presidency intends to take a number of initiatives in several policy areas, including medicines and vaccines, telemedicine and e-health, environmental medicine, alcohol policy, emergency health management, minor and rare diagnoses, and co-operation with neighbouring countries. The Presidency places great emphasis on continuing the well-established Nordic co-operation on drug abuse.

## Knowledge, innovation and growth

Two prerequisites for a competitive society in a globalised world are those of knowledge and the capacity to innovate. Nordic co-operation makes our centres of knowledge and learning even stronger, as well as

internationally competitive. In turn, wider European co-operation provides them with a further boost. The Norwegian Presidency will emphasise the pushing forward of those innovations that are already underway in Nordic research co-operation, and will generally encourage even closer co-operation on innovation and knowledge-based growth.

Knowledge and innovation, in both research and business circles, are essential to growth. Working together on research and innovation improves competitiveness in the international market, and this is especially the case for small countries. Closer Nordic co-operation can broaden our knowledge base and increase expertise in strategic areas.

The Norwegian Presidency will actively follow up on the process of change currently being implemented in Nordic research co-operation. It will be important to make sure that the Nordic Research Board lives up to its mandate and makes an effective contribution to fulfilling the vision of the Nordic Region as an attractive, leading research region.

A knowledge-based society must be based on a high-quality education system. The Norwegian Presidency will strive for closer Nordic co-operation on quality in education, and to increase the international competitiveness of Nordic higher education. Involvement in the pan-European Bologna process is important in this context. Emphasis will also be placed on devising a more efficient system for approving overseas qualifications so that, for example, better use can be made of the new skills immigrants bring to the Nordic countries.

The overall objectives of Nordic cultural co-operation are to promote a diversity of cultural idioms in the Nordic Region and to enhance the Nordic dimension in the cultural life of the Nordic countries. These objectives will be pursued by concentrating on the mobility of people and cultural products, and on making Nordic art and culture widely accessible. The Nordic Ministers of Culture have taken the initiative to reform Nordic cultural co-operation, and the proposals for change are scheduled for implementation in 2007. The Norwegian Presidency will help to make sure that a new structure is introduced in an efficient, responsible manner.

Globalisation has an increasing impact on the Nordic language and cultural community. The Presidency will draw attention to this issue, particularly when following up on the proposal for a Nordic declaration on language policy. Improving understanding of neighbouring languages in the Nordic Region will be a priority. Work on language and language policy will also be evaluated to define how best to organise it within the Nordic Council of Ministers.

An important objective for the Norwegian Presidency is for the Nordic Region to become one of the world's leading regions in terms of competitiveness and economic growth. Involvement in the pan-European Bologna process is important in this context. The Presidency will place great emphasis on the need for links between research and innovation. This will happen, for example, through closer co-operation and co-ordination

between the Nordic Research Board and the Nordic Innovation Centre (NICE), and by continuing to provide a Nordic dialogue forum about research and innovation.

As far as trade and industry policy is concerned, the Norwegian Presidency will propose a special initiative for entrepreneurs and innovative companies.

In terms of regional policy, a project is to be launched to adapt innovation policy to regional conditions in the Nordic Region. A comparative study will also be commissioned, into policies for peripheral regions in the Nordic countries and at European level.

Within the Ministerial Council for Fisheries, Agriculture, Forestry and Food (MR-FJSL), Norway will call for greater coherence in the cross-sectoral promotion of Nordic food and cuisine.

## Following through on previous priorities

In addition to the three main priorities that it will pursue, the Norwegian Presidency considers it important to continue and follow up on initiatives taken by previous presidencies. The programme is based on the revised Nordic Strategy for Sustainable Development 2005–2008, a strategy that focuses on a broad understanding of the concept of sustainability, which covers economic and social conditions as well as ecological factors. The Norwegian Presidency will place great emphasis on the implementation of this strategy and on the work to develop positive indicators for sustainable development.

The Norwegian Presidency particularly wants to prioritise two tasks carried over from previous presidencies: *freedom of movement in the Nordic Region* and *the streamlining of Nordic co-operation*.

One of the basic objectives of Nordic political co-operation is that of making it increasingly easy for citizens to move freely within the Nordic Region in order to live, work, study and do business. Recent years have seen conscious efforts to identify and break down obstacles to freedom of movement. The promotion of freedom of movement has generated many tangible positive results but many issues remain to be resolved.

The Norwegian Presidency will place great emphasis on following up on unresolved issues and continuing the work of promoting open borders in the Nordic Region. This will entail special efforts in two areas:

- the improvement of conditions for companies doing cross-border business in the Nordic Region
- the evaluation of opportunities for closer co-operation between the Council of Ministers and the cross-border committees, on the removal of obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement.

An evaluation will also be conducted of whether to continue the work initiated by the Danish Presidency on the uniform implementation of EU/EEA regulations. Good Nordic consultation processes are an important way to stop inconsistent implementation from throwing up new obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement.

The Presidency will also continuously assess the need for organisational change in the Council of Ministers' work on freedom of movement.

The Norwegian Presidency will continue the *process of modernisation and structural change* which was started in 2005. One priority will be to ensure the positive implementation of the new structure, with 11 instead of 18 ministerial councils. This is scheduled to be introduced in January 2006. In addition to the practical changes necessitated by the new structure, the Presidency will encourage further rejuvenation of the Council of Ministers' activities.

The Norwegian Presidency will underline the importance of methods of working that enhance the dynamics of co-operation in all of the sectors, specifically:

- evaluating changes to methods of working which will reinforce the political content of ministerial council meetings
- making changes to the budget process to free up resources that create more space to follow up on political priorities
- studying the ministerial councils' sub-committee structures, budgeting procedures, etc.

The Presidency will also assess any other needs as they arise.

## Summary of main issues

### Co-operation in the North of Europe

The Norwegian Presidency will prioritise getting the new Russia Programme and dialogue with Russian partners off to a good start.

The Presidency will prioritise the proper implementation of the new Arctic programme for co-operation.

The Presidency will encourage the closest possible dialogue, co-ordination and complementarity between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the other councils in the North of Europe.

The Presidency will prioritise the following initiatives in the North:

- the Nordic strategy for work on climate and pollution in the Arctic Region
- the administrative plan for the Barents Sea as a Nordic model for further international implementation of ecosystem-based administration
- changes to the environmental frameworks for the utilisation of natural resources in the North
- the social consequences of climate changes.

The Presidency will contribute to the development of co-operation between the Council of Europe and the Nordic Council of Ministers to draw particular attention to children with disabilities and their families in countries neighbouring the Nordic Region; for example, a conference is planned in St Petersburg on the theme 'Community Living for Children with Disabilities'.

The Presidency will prioritise Nordic-Russian co-operation on energy that helps develop safe and sustainable energy systems in North-West Russia.

### The Nordic welfare model

The Norwegian Presidency will prioritise the following up of the Nordic action plan, 'Design for All/Universal Design'.

### *Health*

The Presidency is in favour of closer Nordic co-operation on health, including in areas such as e-health and telemedicine, medicines and vaccines, and environmental medicine, with the emphasis on the harmonisation of child immunisation programmes and collaboration on the production of flu vaccines.

The Presidency encourages closer Nordic co-operation on emergency health response management.

The Presidency will recreate a forum for Nordic co-operation on minor and rare diagnoses.

The Presidency will encourage initiatives based on the statement on alcohol policy published by the Nordic Ministers of Health and Social Affairs.

The Presidency will encourage closer Nordic co-operation on drug abuse.

### *Gender equality*

The Presidency will focus closely on gender and power.

The Presidency will incorporate aspects of family policy as one of several prerequisites for gender equality.

The Presidency will organise conferences about gender and power, and young people and gender.

### *Children and young people*

The Presidency will set up a Nordic Youth Panel, which will help discover young people's views of the Nordic Region and Nordic co-operation.

The Presidency would like to shed light on young people's attitudes to gender equality and, for example, organise a conference along with the Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research (NIKK) on the impact of pornography on young people's attitudes to gender.

The Presidency will look at the conditions faced by children and young people whose daily lives are characterised by poverty and social exclusion and will, for example, convene a Nordic conference on initiatives to improve the lives of the poorest children and their families.

The Presidency will call on the Nordic Council of Ministers to play an important regional role in the Nordic and Baltic countries in the implementation of the European Youth Campaign for diversity, human rights and participation.

The Presidency will call on the Nordic Council of Ministers to commit to a regional follow up of the Council of Europe's programme to combat violence against children and young people.

#### *Justice*

The Presidency will organise a Nordic conference to discuss experiences of and initiatives concerning the problems of child and youth crime, and will follow up on this.

The Presidency aims to convene a Nordic conference on combating domestic violence and a seminar about the problems around adults making contact with children - especially on the Internet - with a view to abusing them.

The Presidency wishes to draw attention to the theme of protection against discrimination by organising a seminar about discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, disability, etc.

#### *The economy*

In the eyes of the Norwegian Presidency, the exchange of information and discussions of EU issues concerning the economy and finance will continue to be important items on the agenda at meetings of the Nordic Ministers of Finance. Nordic co-operation also has an important contribution to make to the consistent implementation of EU/EEA legislation.

The Presidency will continue the work being done to identify and break down taxation obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement.

### Knowledge, innovation and growth

#### *Education and research*

The Norwegian Presidency will encourage closer Nordic co-operation on quality in education, for example, by hosting a major research conference at which a joint Nordic research report about the results of PISA 2003 will be presented.

The Presidency will prioritise the renewal of Nordic co-operation on research and continue the process of developing the Nordic Region into a strong research region at international level.

In general, the Presidency will encourage even closer co-operation on innovation and knowledge-based growth.

The Presidency will prioritise the exertion of greater Nordic influence on European co-operation, such as through a major international conference in co-operation with the EU Commission on the Nordic Region's contribution to the future development of the European Research and Innovation Area (ERIA).

### *Culture*

The Presidency will work for open borders and mobility for people and cultural products, and will help to ensure a broad accessibility of Nordic art and culture.

The Presidency will continue work to develop a Nordic media programme that focuses on the production of computer games with quality content for children and young people in the Nordic Region.

The Presidency will organise a Nordic conference about the experiences of 'The Cultural Schoolbag', a major cultural policy campaign designed to give all pupils in Norwegian primary and lower secondary schools access to professional culture.

The Presidency will host a conference, with the working title 'The Good Culture Institution' in order to draw attention to the cultural institution as an organisation for the implementation of cultural policy and policy objectives.

The Presidency will prioritise ensuring that the new structure in the culture sector is introduced in as responsible and efficient a manner as possible.

### *Language*

The Presidency will follow up on the proposal for a Nordic language policy declaration, for example by evaluating the need for a Nordic strategy to face up to the threat of domain loss to the Nordic languages and to encourage closer Nordic co-operation on language technology.

The Presidency will work to make the Nordic languages more easily accessible in writing, speech, literature and art, and will pave the way for the Nordic Houses and institutes to play even more active roles as communicators of language and culture.

The Presidency wishes to evaluate how the Council of Ministers' work with languages and language policy can best be organised in order to get optimal results in terms of strengthening the understanding of neighbouring languages in the Nordic Region.

### *Business*

The Presidency, in close collaboration with the Nordic Innovation Centre (NICE), will prioritise the promotion of co-operation between business and research.

The Presidency aims to organise a conference, in collaboration with the Nordic Innovation Centre (NICE), about small innovative companies, entrepreneurs and independent inventors

The Presidency will prioritise the continuation of the work to remove obstacles to freedom of movement for business.

### *Energy*

The Presidency will prioritise Nordic-Russian co-operation on energy that helps develop safe and sustainable energy systems in North-West Russia.

### *Regional policy*

The Presidency will commission a project to adopt an innovation policy to suit regional conditions in the Nordic Region. It will also commission a comparative study of policies for peripheral regions in the Nordic countries and at European level.

The Presidency will commission a study of the Council of Ministers' co-operation with the cross-border regions, and of the role of the information offices, in relation to efforts to reduce obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement.

A conference is planned for the Nordic Region, the Baltic States, Scotland and Ireland (Norden Pluss) with a view to drawing up a strategic co-operation plan in areas of joint interest, and with a focus on the North of Europe and its place in the development of European policy.

The Presidency will accord high priority to the future development of Nordic co-operation as a follow-up to the regional policy agenda in the EU/EEA.

#### *Labour market*

The Presidency will continue co-operation by studying the effects of the enlarged European labour market on employment, unemployment, working conditions and pay in the Nordic countries.

The Presidency also wishes to widen the perspective somewhat, by assessing the vulnerability to the processes linked to globalisation of Nordic labour markets and Nordic standards for health, the environment and security.

The Presidency will prioritise practical co-operation on the interpretation and implementation of EU/EEA regulations in national regulations in order to avoid creating unnecessary differences – and therefore obstacles to freedom of movement – between the Nordic countries.

#### *Fisheries, agriculture and food*

The Presidency, in collaboration with the FAO, will organise an international conference in 2006 on the ecosystem-based administration of living marine resources.

The Presidency will suggest greater efforts to publicise and further develop Nordic food and cuisine as a Nordic brand based on the diverse range of Nordic raw materials and food, and its varied food culture.

The Presidency will follow up on the work done on village development, the new roles of the farmer and the cultural landscape, and will promote the conditions for positive trends in job creation, cultural activities and set-up grants.

#### *The environment*

The Presidency will address the question of widespread grassroots participation in work on the environment and sustainability. A mapping exercise will illustrate positive Nordic examples of participation in the preparation of a Local Agenda 21 conference which will be held in Norway in autumn 2006.

The Presidency wishes to hold a Nordic competition, as part of which local communities will be invited to suggest how they would achieve Nordic objectives (such as reversing the decline in biological diversity) by 2010.

The Presidency has assumed responsibility for running a workshop about the follow-up to the UN Millennium Development Goal Reviews. It will focus on experiences of local environmental management and the role that local communities play in both the sustainable administration of natural resources and the war on poverty.