

Social policy reforms are often a reaction against altered economic and social structures. The Nordic countries must respond to new challenges so that important gains such as abolishing poverty, narrowing the social gap, and increasing women's freedom of action are not jeopardized. It will consequently be an important challenge for the Nordic Council and for Nordic cooperation to formulate reform strategies that will make it possible to coordinate measures to ensure citizens' social security in a globalized economy.

8 A competent Nordic region

Cultural cooperation plays an important role in promoting and maintaining a sense of regional community. Cultural cooperation is one of the cornerstones of Nordic cooperation, making developing this area a high-priority concern. In 2007, the Nordic Council will focus on implementing the new structure for Nordic cultural cooperation. In the years to come, special attention will also be paid to the potentials for development that emerge when the links between culture and business are strengthened. Speaking and understanding one another's languages are essential in this perspective, which is why language policy issues will be important. The declaration on a Nordic language policy, adopted in 2006, will be followed up with concrete measures.

Education and research are decisive factors for how the Nordic countries will fare when they face global competition. The Nordic Council will bring initiatives in these areas to the fore, especially in relation to continued work with the Nordic countries as a global "winner region."

9 A responsible Nordic region

The Nordic Council works concertedly to make the Nordic countries a leading region when it comes to global responsibility, so that the feeling of solidarity that permeates the Nordic societies internally also guides the Nordic countries' actions globally. Today, the Nordic countries are major players in humanitarian and aid work in various parts of the world. The Nordic countries' active interest in foreign and security policy issues, including civil crisis management and social safety, aims at strengthening and coordinating their ability to deal with crises and catastrophes. The Nordic countries have long-term experience and broad expertise in these matters. Strong Nordic cooperation contributes to improving capabilities both at home and abroad.

Facts about the Nordic Council

In 2007, the Nordic Council will hold three joint meetings – in January, April, and September – and the Nordic Council Session in the last week in October. In addition, the Nordic Council's committees will hold separate theme conferences at the end of June. The presidency in 2007 will be held by Norway.

The Nordic Council has 87 members organized in delegations from five countries and three autonomous territories: Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland. There are four party groups: the Social Democratic Group, the Centrist Group, the Conservative Group, and the Left Socialist/Green Group. Seven members of the Nordic Council are not members of any party group. The Sámi Parliamentary Council has observer status in the Nordic Council. The Nordic Council's secretariat is located in Copenhagen.

Nordic Council bodies:

- Presidium
- Culture and Education and Training Committee
- Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee
- Welfare Committee
- Environment and Natural Resources Committee
- Business and Industry Committee
- Control Committee

Nordic cooperation organizations:

- West Nordic Council
- Norden Associations
- Nordic Youth Council

International

The Nordic Council's international cooperation is intended to promote Nordic values and standpoints in broader international contexts, to instigate parliamentary cooperation in facing challenges in northern Europe and the Baltic Sea region, and to contribute to opinion-building and initiatives involving the Arctic and Barents Sea regions. Some of this cooperation contributes to the development of the Northern Dimension and helps build bridges between the EU and its neighbors to the east.

The Nordic Council cooperates with the Baltic Assembly (BA); the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), with the Council carrying out e.g. secretariat functions; the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR); and the Russian Federal Assembly. There has been a greater focus on collaboration with the European Parliament in recent years.

The Nordic Council's international contact network also includes the following organizations:

- Parliamentary Assembly of North-West Russia (PANWR)
- Benelux Parliament (BICC)
- British-Irish Interparliamentary Body (BIIPB)
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE PA)
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union (WEU PA)
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)
- Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB)
- Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-IPA)

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Facing globalization together

Nordic parliamentary cooperation aims at promoting the development of political, economic, environmental, social, and other spheres in the Nordic countries and northern Europe. In a globalized world where all of the five countries and autonomous areas must overcome stiff competition, Nordic cooperation can take on a new meaning and yield new results, to the benefit of our Nordic inhabitants. The Nordic Council has agreed on an agenda that will enable us to work together with our governments to take advantage of the opportunities that intensified Nordic cooperation can open up.

The Nordic countries have obvious common positions of strength that can best be exploited on the global market through a coordinated strategic effort. A unified Nordic front does, however, require a concerted effort.

The Nordic countries have a strong starting point. All our countries have a solid foundation for dealing with international competition. We have common values. We have built up welfare societies that work well and enjoy considerable popular backing. In many areas, we have chosen different models and we have different positions of strength. This is why we have something to give one another in close cooperation, yielding a far better result than each individual country would be able to achieve on its own.

1 A Nordic region with no borders

Companies and private individuals must be able to move and work freely in the Nordic countries without encountering cross-border obstacles. This is a basic prerequisite if the Nordic countries are to retain and improve their position as a competitive region in a globalized world.

Because of a comprehensive welfare system and a large public sector, the Nordic countries have many rules, laws, and directives in different areas of society. These rules and laws have not always proved compatible. As Nordic citizens and companies are increasingly being based and function in two or more Nordic countries, this problem has become more acute.

It is consequently of prime importance that a body be founded to which individuals and companies can turn when they encounter barriers. The Nordic countries will thus work to have a Nordic ombudsman system established on a permanent basis so that they can systematically overcome cross-border obstacles.

2 An environmentally aware Nordic region

The Nordic countries’ continued development as a global “winner region” rests partly on enterprises and households having access to reliable supplies of energy that is produced and distributed in a sustainable manner. This is why energy policy must be formulated so that it takes into account Nordic goals for the environment and climate, on the one hand, and distribution and supply goals, on the other. This means reducing the use of fossil fuels and investing in various environmentally friendly energy sources. Nordic cooperation should consequently concentrate more on developing and exploiting renewable energy. As far as radioactive waste is concerned, it is in the Nordic interest to manage and store this waste in keeping with the strictest possible security requirements.

Environmental awareness and lofty ambitions for environmental protection are important cornerstones in the Nordic “winner concept.” In this context, the Nordic Council will continue collaboration with the non-Nordic Baltic states to combat such problems as the indefensibly large discharges of nitrogen and phosphorus into the Baltic Sea. Creating a Nordic brand for environmental and energy technologies and sustainable system exports plays a major role in the Nordic Council’s work of further developing the Nordic countries as an influential region.

3 The Nordic fight against trafficking in human beings

Organized crime and violence are direct threats to the Nordic social model, which is largely characterized by a respect for human rights and security for all citizens. This is why the Nordic Council will continue the fight against trafficking in human beings, other forms of organized crime, and infringements on human rights. In dealing with these issues, the Nordic Council will work together with other international organizations in order to achieve the best possible results.

4 Multicultural coexistence in the Nordic region

An important prerequisite for developing the Nordic countries as a region is that different ethnic groups take part in society’s fundamental processes and activities. With this in mind, the Nordic Council will strive to further promote constructive coexistence among society’s different ethnic groups. Special attention will be paid to the situation of immigrant women from the perspective of gender equality.

5 A Nordic region of cooperation

Because of increasing international interaction, the Nordic countries must focus increasingly on regional cooperation. This means greater commitment to cooperation in the Baltic Sea and West Nordic regions and to cooperation involving the Arctic and Barents Sea areas. It is essential for the Nordic countries to promote an awareness of the most important challenges and issues for cooperation in these regions. It is the Nordic Council’s ambition to involve its neighboring countries in active participation in regional bodies for cooperation.

6 A competitive Nordic region

The Nordic Council will focus on key economic policy conditions in relation to the global challenges that Nordic enterprises face every day. It is a fundamental requirement that business and research institutions in the Nordic countries have the necessary global competences. This means that they must have a knowledge of and experience with new competence requirements, trade patterns, financial methods, and intercultural forms of social intercourse. The Nordic Council will promote the necessary initiatives in this field in order to ensure that this is the case.

Another goal set by the Nordic Council is to generate economic resources across Nordic borders so that both new entrepreneurs and established companies have better access to seed and development capital. The Nordic countries should exploit their forms of regional cooperation more efficiently than they have in the past in order to optimize the use of existing capital and at the same time work together to raise further capital for this purpose.

It is decisive for the Nordic countries that the innovation sector continue to evolve. This can be accomplished through improved interplay between researchers and innovation environments and between innovation environments and companies. User-driven innovation is a key concept in this connection.

7 A society for all

There is a clear link between good public health and a society characterized by economic and social security. People must be able and dare to change their careers or jobs when this is necessary to keep them in the job market. Economic stress and social insecurity cause ill health. Good health and economic and social security are important success factors if the Nordic countries are to remain in the fore of international developments. In 2007, the Nordic Council will focus on the Nordic welfare model in this connection.