



## **Guidelines for the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 2009–2013**

### **The nature of the co-operation:**

The guidelines reflect the wish for closer Nordic–Baltic co-operation in areas of common interest, and the need for greater cohesion between the eight countries.<sup>1</sup>

The Nordic-Baltic co-operation is a multilateral co-operation between eight countries (the NB8), i.e. the Nordic countries, within the framework of the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), working with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

First and foremost, the co-operation between the NCM and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania should be a political co-operation that generates Nordic–Baltic benefit. All parties are welcome to propose initiatives, and the exchange of “best practice” can help to accomplish shared goals.

The Nordic-Baltic co-operation should be focused and on an equal basis, and will be based on common values such as democracy, good governance, equality, freedom of speech and tolerance and allowing cultural co-operation, amongst other things, to serve as a link in Nordic–Baltic relationships.

Focused Nordic–Baltic co-operation will help to promote a strong Baltic Sea Region (Top of Europe) that is attractive for citizens, companies, investors and labour. All of these areas will be profiled together, and together they can positively affect growth, welfare and competitiveness in the Region. The Nordic-Baltic co-operation will in parallel support the development of the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy, which, amongst other, takes as its starting point the targets laid down in the Lisbon Process.

At the same time, the co-operation will contribute to joint efforts to address the opportunities and challenges of globalisation, based on the Nordic Prime Ministers' press release from the meeting in Punkaharju in June 2007 and the Riksgränsen Declaration of April 2008.

The Nordic-Baltic co-operation will complement the Nordic countries' bilateral co-operation with the Baltic countries. The co-operation will be implemented with a view to achieving synergies that are relevant to the work of other regional organisations, especially the Council of the Baltic Sea States<sup>2</sup> and the EU/EEA, by serving as a platform for the potential co-ordination of views on matters of common interest.

The Nordic-Baltic co-operation can contribute to positive social development in the Region, and contribute to co-operation that transcends the EU/EEA's external borders by promoting cross-border regional co-operation – e.g. in collaboration with the EU and through the use of EU instruments. In addition, the co-operation can help to support the Northern Dimension, where initiatives involving Nordic, Baltic and Russian partners alike will be prioritised. Dialogue with the Nordic Council about the co-operation will be continued.

### **The nature of the guidelines:**

These guidelines will determine the activities of the NCM, and shall be seen as a starting point for the development of joint ambitions and activities between the eight countries. Responsibility for specific processes lies with relevant ministerial councils and committees of senior officials, along with Estonia,

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<sup>1</sup> The five Nordic countries also include the autonomous territories – the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

<sup>2</sup> Special consideration will be given to the structural reform of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, as per the prime ministers' decision in Riga, 4 June 2008.

Latvia and Lithuania.<sup>3</sup> The NCM consulted the governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania during the drafting of the guidelines.

The Ministers for Nordic Co-operation (MR-SAM) and the Nordic Committee for Co-operation (NSK) have the overall responsibility for co-ordinating the joint Nordic elements of the co-operation and for the overall co-ordination with relevant Baltic parties.

Responsibility for the specific content of Nordic–Baltic co-operation lies with the respective ministerial councils, while MR-SAM has overall responsibility. This ensures that the co-operation follows the principle guidelines laid down by MR-SAM, while the specific content can be defined by the relevant ministers.

If required, each ministerial council may co-operate with a single Baltic country in accordance with specific areas of interest. The starting point however remains that all three Baltic countries should be involved in the Nordic-Baltic co-operation, especially preparing for and running joint Nordic–Baltic meetings. The more institutionalised the co-operation, the greater the need for the participation of all eight countries.

The natural institutional foundation for the co-operation will be regular Nordic–Baltic meetings at ministerial and civil-servant level.

The guidelines should not be regarded as a final product, but as a step in the ongoing process to further develop co-operation, with all eight countries involved in this process. The task of the NCM as an institution is to assist in the work in such a way that NB8 co-operation may develop for the good of all eight countries. The NCM Secretariat (NCMS) will be available for assistance to the NB8 co-operation to the extent possible and as requested by the parties involved in those areas that fall under the auspices of the NCM.

#### **Priority areas:**

One priority will be to continue to build upon existing, effective and well-established co-operation in areas where further work is considered to be of mutual benefit. Promoting the Nordic Region is in the interests of all of the Nordic countries. The joint Nordic–Baltic cultural activities can be used as a lever for the co-operation and can contribute to the promotion of intercultural understanding.

Specific areas of interest for closer co-operation are to be jointly defined. Gender-equality principles are central and will continue to be integrated into the co-operation.

The work on further developing the Nordic–Baltic political community will have an impact on most of the NCM's areas of co-operation. However, it is necessary to identify the key themes for Nordic-Baltic co-operation, which will guide the work of the various ministerial councils.

More specific areas of co-operation within these themes will be jointly defined and prioritised.

NCM has a special interest in developing certain key areas, especially the following themes:

- Education, research and innovation
- Business, cluster networks and creative industries
- The environment, climate and energy (including environmental conditions in the Baltic Sea and the promotion of effective environmental technologies and sustainable sources of energy, where

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<sup>3</sup> The guidelines were endorsed by the meeting of Nordic-Baltic foreign ministers in Parnu, 10 September 2008.

joint approaches to sustainable development may be particularly beneficial<sup>4</sup>)

- The international challenges faced by welfare societies. Possible areas of co-operation include combating human trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS; improving co-operation between police forces and public prosecution services; developing hospital services; and addressing demographic challenges in relation to, e.g. labour-market policy. Elements of this co-operation could be based on the Northern Dimension's Partnership for Public Health and Social Well-being.
- Cross-border regional co-operation to promote joint fundamental values, such as democracy, good governance, gender equality, freedom of speech and tolerance – both under Nordic–Baltic auspices and in relation to other neighbouring countries, including Belarus.

### **Instruments that support the development of the NB8 co-operation:**

The co-operation's value lies in both its quality and in the parties' commitment. The instruments used to implement specific elements of the co-operation will vary. They include:

- joint policy development and co-ordination, including in relation to the EU's inner market
- joint co-operation programmes, action plans and declarations
- joint Nordic–Baltic mobility programmes
- joint initiatives that can form the basis for promoting projects with special development potential, which can then act as "pathfinders"
- joint initiatives linked to work that is of common interest in other international forums
- exchanges of experiences and information (benchmarking)
- co-operation with non-governmental organisations within NGO programmes
- co-operation within Nordic institutions, which will be based on demand and extremely flexible. The option of full co-ownership or more comprehensive partnership will be kept open.
- relevant joint ministerial meetings held on a regular basis and prepared by committees of senior officials and Baltic colleagues. Committees of senior officials will develop and reinforce NB8 meetings as needed.
- development of improved mechanisms of co-ordination with the Presidency of the NB8, which does not necessarily coincide with the Presidency of the NCM
- cross-border regional co-operation, including collaboration with the EU and the use of EU instruments. This includes Nordic/Baltic co-operation as well as third-party co-operation between Nordic, Baltic and Russian or other partners – e.g. in association with the realisation of the Northern Dimension partnerships.

NCM and its offices and information points (which are a part of NCMS) are catalysts for Nordic–Baltic co-operation. The offices co-operate closely with the Nordic diplomatic representations and co-ordinate joint Nordic initiatives. The offices identify trends and opportunities for Nordic–Baltic co-operation in dialogue with the Nordic embassies. The offices promote everything that is "Nordic" and broadly profile Nordic co-operation. The offices also act as project administrators, including in Nordic–EU projects or joint Nordic–Baltic projects, and are responsible for practical casework, quality assurance, etc. The heads of the NCM offices report directly to the Secretary General of the NCM.

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<sup>4</sup> The Nordic-based international financial institutions NEFCO and NIB play an important role in this context. They already work actively with HELCOM on the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Meetings between the NCMS (Copenhagen), the NCM offices in Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius, and the Nordic diplomatic representations take place twice a year.

**Financial principles:**

Fundamentally, the Nordic-Baltic co-operation is a partnership on an equal footing, and each party covers its own costs. In special cases, the parties may collectively agree on a different method of meeting costs, e.g. joint mobility schemes funded according to relative GDP.

**Timetable:**

The guidelines will apply from 2009 to 2013, and will thus run alongside the EU's financial perspective. Regular evaluations will take place during this period.

**Evaluation:**

The Nordic-Baltic co-operation will be continuously evaluated. MR-SAM will conduct an in-depth mid-term evaluation in 2011, particularly in the light of the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy. An external evaluator will take part in the mid-term evaluation. The results of a further evaluation will be presented in 2013.

The Ministers for Nordic Co-operation will continue to conduct an annual review, in general and in principle, of the development of the NB8 co-operation on the basis of a brief report. Each ministerial council and relevant institution will once a year prepare a status report on the co-operation. These reports will outline the initiatives that have been implemented and evaluate the extent to which the political objectives have been met as well as whether it is desirable to retain or alter the political priorities. The reports from ministerial councils will also include a short description and evaluation of the coming year's activities.

The final progress report will, following approval from MR-SAM, be sent by the Secretary General of the NCM to the Nordic and the Baltic foreign ministers. This will establish a natural cohesion between the work done within the NB8 framework in areas under both NCM auspices and at foreign-minister level, which is a part of the informal Nordic co-operation.<sup>5</sup> Evaluation of the Nordic-Baltic co-operation should also be discussed at Nordic-Baltic level, the specifics of which will be agreed between the relevant parties.

Individual initiatives and specific projects will be regularly monitored and evaluated, and the lessons learned will help to further develop the Nordic-Baltic co-operation.

**Profiling:**

In the future, both the sectoral ministers and the ministers for Nordic co-operation will increasingly highlight and promote joint Nordic-Baltic co-operation and thereby spread knowledge about and create greater interest in the Nordic-Baltic co-operation, and to raise its profile both in and beyond the Nordic Region. This task is also assigned to the NCM offices in the Baltic countries and the NCMS in Copenhagen. The work will be done in collaboration with the Nordic diplomatic representations, relevant Nordic authorities and Nordic institutions.

The profiling of the Nordic-Baltic co-operation will be expanded and co-ordinated with the Baltic partners, who ought to be involved on all levels and as much as possible in the process of making the co-operation visible.

The profiling of the Nordic-Baltic co-operation will also be done in line with the NCM's general profiling and communication strategies.

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<sup>5</sup> This will also help the foreign ministers to establish closer co-operation with the NB8 Presidency.