



A 1571/the Presidium

Submitted by:
The Presidium

Appendix:
International Strategy for the
Nordic Council

Ref.no. 12-00260-1

Presidium proposal on the International strategy for the Nordic Council

1. Proposal submitted by the Presidium

The Presidium proposes

that the enclosed International strategy for the Nordic Council be approved.

2. Background

At the 2009 Session, the Nordic Council adopted an EU strategy, which was updated in 2011 under the title: "*A Nordic voice in the EU*". The 2011 Session also approved "*The guidelines for the Nordic Council's Co-operation 2012-2015 with the State Duma and the Russian Federation Council, as well as with the regional parliaments in North-West Russia*". The international strategy summarises additional priorities for other parts of the Nordic Council's outward-looking-activities.

3. Hearing

The International Strategy for the Nordic Council has been discussed several times in the Presidium. A draft strategy has also been sent to the committees for information.

4. The views of the Presidium

The Nordic Council wants to be actively involved in foreign policy and defence issues and would like to strengthen its international work. The Nordic Region is particularly well placed to be a dynamic player in Northern Europe and the North Atlantic. The goal is to develop international contacts into a more active form of co-operation, one that will lead to tangible political initiatives.

The Nordic Council would, if possible, like to make Nordic co-operation on foreign- and defence policy part of the formal intergovernmental co-

operation under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Nordic Council wants to provide greater input into the European Union, particularly in relation to the Nordic members of the European Parliament. A series of Nordic contributions to Arctic policy were formulated at the theme session in March 2012. In other areas, such as the work with parliaments in Russia and in the Baltic Sea region, co-operation has already reached a level where what is required is not even more contacts, but closer political co-operation. The strategy looks at which outward-looking activities the Nordic Council wishes to prioritise.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the above the Presidium proposes that

that the enclosed International strategy for the Nordic Council be approved.

Gothenburg, 26 September 2012

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International strategy for the Nordic Council The Nordic Region as a dynamic player in Northern Europe and the North Atlantic

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Objectives

The Nordic Council is actively involved in foreign policy and defence issues and would like to strengthen its international work. The Nordic Region is particularly well placed to be a dynamic player in Northern Europe and the North Atlantic. The goal is to develop international contacts into a more active form of co-operation that will lead to political initiatives.

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The Nordic Council would, if possible, like to make Nordic foreign- and defence-policy co-operation part of the formal intergovernmental co-operation under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers. This would allow the policy area to assume a central position in Nordic co-operation. The Nordic Council wants to strengthen its input into the European Union, particularly in relation to the Nordic members of the European Parliament. At the theme session in March 2012, a series of Nordic contributions were formulated for Arctic policy. In other areas, such as the work with parliaments in Russia and in the Baltic Sea region, co-operation is at such a level that what is required is not even more contacts, but closer political co-operation. This strategy examines the outward-looking activities that the Nordic Council wishes to prioritise.

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Means

International co-operation takes place through joint meetings, through participation in each other's events and study programmes, and through parliamentary networks, including those of other regional organisations. The Nordic Council will, inter alia, through the regional parliamentary bodies in which it participates – in the Baltic Sea, the Arctic, Barents Sea, Northern Dimension – work actively to meet common political goals.

The Presidium has overall responsibility for the Nordic Council's outreach activities, but the committees should also be involved, given that objectives of this work include exchanging experiences and learning from each other's *best practices*.

Foreign and defence policy

Objectives

The Nordic Council strives actively for a closer Nordic focus on foreign and defence policy. Co-operation between Nordic foreign and defence ministers has become closer following the 2009 Stoltenberg Report and the 2010 Gade-Birkavs Report on Nordic-Baltic co-operation.

As far as defence policy is concerned, Nordic co-operation (NORDEFECO) has been strengthened, with a focus on themes such as "green defence", co-operation in the Arctic and joint Nordic initiatives in relation to procurement, training and exercises.

The tragic events in Norway of 22 July 2011 made civil security topical once again. Formal Nordic intergovernmental co-operation should be strengthened in this area. All of the Nordic countries also actively work together on development policy through, for example, the *Nordic Development Fund*. However, proposals for formal Nordic foreign-policy co-operation have not yet been widely reciprocated in government circles. A formal Council of Ministers would be the best option in the long term, but in the meantime there should be some kind of "mechanism" that brings

MPs on the Nordic Council more formally into the process of developing closer co-operation on foreign and defence policy.

The Nordic Council

Means

The Nordic Council maintains a dialogue with the foreign ministers via informal meetings at sessions of the Nordic Council and in the plenary debates addressing foreign policy at the sessions. Attempts are being made to extend the dialogue. These include convening a meeting in the spring between the President of the Nordic Council, the security-policy rapporteur and the foreign minister of the country holding the annual Presidency of the Council of Ministers. Similar meetings may also be held with the defence minister of the country that holds the Presidency of the Nordic Defence Co-operation (NORDEFECO).

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The Nordic Council is in the process of improving dialogue with the Council of Ministers on the latter's activities in Northern Europe and the North Atlantic. The Nordic Council would also like more dialogue about the Council of Ministers' EU activities, and an annual report will be presented during the foreign-policy debate at the Session. The Nordic Council should be active in the foreign-policy debate in the Nordic Region, via the Presidency and the appointed rapporteurs.

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The European Union – particularly the European Parliament

Objectives

Nordic co-operation in the EU continues to grow in relevance. The Nordic Region is a part of Europe, and the Nordic countries are all members of either the EU or the EEA. Nordic co-operation does not compete with other forms of collaboration – rather, it is a supplementary form of regional policy partnership. Working more closely together on specific EU proposals would enable the Nordic countries to play a more influential role within the EU.

Means

The Session of the Nordic Council in Copenhagen, 1–3 November 2011, approved an EU strategy for the Nordic Council, "*A Nordic voice in the EU*", which identifies channels of influence. Issues of Nordic relevance and opportunities for joint Nordic influence must be selected in conjunction with, in particular, the Nordic members of the European Parliament.

All committees should adopt positions on selected EU cases that are relevant to the entire Nordic Region. The Committees decide whether to follow up with meetings, written correspondence or other initiatives, particularly in relation to the Nordic members of the European Parliament. Contact should also be established with national EU committees in the Nordic countries and with relevant ministers in the Nordic Council of Ministers regarding selected topics of joint Nordic interest. The party groups play an important role in the European Parliament, and therefore it would be an advantage to forge closer contact between Nordic and European party groups. Members of the Nordic Council are encouraged to make use of the services offered by parliamentary staff seconded to the European Parliament and the EU delegations in Brussels.

Arctic co-operation

Objectives

The Nordic Council chose to make Arctic policy the theme for the Session in Reykjavik in March 2012. The Session agreed to adopt closer co-operation in the Arctic, including proposals for a joint Nordic strategy. The Nordic countries have no wish to act as a block in the Arctic Council. Nevertheless, the Nordic Council wishes to maintain a Nordic focus on the ma-

major challenges within environment, research and training, and on requirements in relation to business and industry when Canada assumes the Presidency of the Arctic Council in 2013. Between them, the three Nordic countries have held the Presidency for the last six years.

Means

The task is to follow up on the Nordic governments' and the Nordic Council of Ministers' treatment of the new recommendations on Arctic policy. The Nordic Council's observer among the Arctic parliamentarians in SCPAR must support the efforts to develop even closer parliamentary co-operation in response to the pressing challenges facing the North.

The West Nordic Council, like the Nordic Council, has observer status in SCPAR, the Arctic parliamentarians' committee. There is therefore a joint focus on Arctic themes. In this context, the international activity also includes co-operation with the West Nordic Council. The West Nordic Council also supports contact with the Region's neighbours to the west, particularly Canada. The Nordic Council of Ministers has just taken the first steps toward establishing joint projects. In November 2006, the Nordic Council signed a special agreement with the West Nordic Council, binding the two inter-parliamentary bodies more closely together.

The Northern Dimension, co-operation with parliaments in Russia and the Barents

Objectives

The Nordic Council should help develop parliamentary contacts within the Northern Dimension. The most important objectives for co-operation with parliaments in Russia are:

- *to support peaceful and democratic development in the region*
- *to promote mutual understanding of key issues on the international agenda*
- *to communicate ideas and share experiences.*

The Nordic Council's co-operation with the State Duma and the Federation Council of Russia, as well as the regional parliaments in North-West Russia, has developed positively in recent years. "*Guidelines for Nordic Council co-operation 2012–2015 with the State Duma and Federation Council of Russia, as well as with regional parliaments in the North-West Russia*", which was approved at the Session in 2011, states that the Nordic Council will continue the established co-operation with Russian parliamentarians, but will endeavour to deepen it by focusing on themes such as the four partnerships within the Northern Dimension. A key objective for this co-operation is to promote democracy in Russia. Other specific objectives are a better marine environment in the Baltic Sea and better cultural connections across the borders.

Means

The co-operation takes the form of study programmes, round-table discussions and forums for young politicians. PANWR, the Parliamentary Association of North-West Russia, has planned study programmes in Russia for 2012–2015. As a result, the Nordic Council also decided to plan for a four-year period. In addition, a decision has been taken on which countries will be responsible for the annual round-table discussions, as well as the annual forum for young politicians, up to 2015.

Enhanced bilateral co-operation also strengthens co-operation in the other regional organisations by politicians in the Nordic Council building networks with Russian parliamentarians. Throughout the last 20 years, the Nordic Council has extended its co-operation with Russian politicians in

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regional organisations such as the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), through Arctic co-operation in SCPAR, within the parliamentary forum of the Northern Dimension and as part of the Barents Parliamentary Network. The Nordic Council committees are involved in the four partnerships: culture; social welfare and public health; the environment; and transport and logistics.

The Nordic Council will follow up on the review of the Nordic Council of Ministers' guidelines for co-operation with Russia, which is scheduled to be on the agenda at the Session in 2013.

Baltic Sea co-operation and co-operation with the Baltic Assembly

Objectives

The Nordic Region should work together in Northern Europe, especially in the Baltic Sea region. Such efforts can help to steer the development of the European Union toward Nordic values, including good neighbourly relations with other countries in the area. Within the EU, co-operation will be reinforced through the EU's Baltic Sea strategy, while the Northern Dimension also includes Russia, the EU's neighbour to the east. The Nordic Council is working to build bridges and avoid unnecessary tension between the EU's internal Baltic Sea strategy and the external Northern Dimension.

Means

The Nordic Council maintains close contact with Baltic parliamentarians, especially through the Baltic Assembly, the structure of which is based on the model of the Nordic Council. The Nordic Council established co-operation with Baltic parliamentarians as far back as October 1990, before the Baltic states regained their independence in 1991.

In 2004, when the Baltic countries joined NATO and the European Union, the time was right for a completely equal partnership. European co-operation does not mean that there is any less reason to maintain very close contacts in this area. In fact, the European Union can be a focal point for collaboration between the Nordic Council and Baltic Assembly, and joint initiatives are expected in 2013. Co-operation should also be intensified in other areas where the Nordic Council and Baltic Assembly have common interests.

The BSPC acts as a forum for parliamentary co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region. The Nordic Council consolidated its efforts in this area in April 1992, when the Council took the initiative to follow up on the first conference on Baltic parliamentary co-operation, which took place in Finland in January 1991.

Other important organisations in the region include the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) and the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO), both of which have contributed large sums to projects designed, for example, to clean up the marine environment in the Baltic Sea. Talk of a more focused approach has been transformed into action.

As already mentioned, Russia is an important player in Baltic Sea co-operation. In the last few years, Poland and Germany have also expressed interest in closer co-operation with the Nordic Region, and there have also been initiatives for closer German-Nordic connections via, for example, the joint embassy complex in Berlin. As large countries, Poland and Germany are in a different category to the smaller Nordic and Baltic nation states, but the Nordic Council keeps a close eye on the opportunities both for bilateral co-operation and for closer Baltic co-operation. The latter takes place partly under the auspices of the EU's Baltic Sea strategy, where the Nordic Council of Ministers is active in many projects.

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The Nordic Council will follow up on the review of the Nordic Council of Ministers' guidelines for the co-operation with Russia, which is scheduled to be on the agenda at the Session in 2013. The Nordic Council is also in the process of following up on the NB8 report.

Belarus

Objectives

Since 2007, the Nordic Council has been involved in dialogue with both politicians from the Belarusian parliament and opposition groups not currently represented in parliament. The Baltic Assembly has been a partner in this initiative. The purpose is to contribute to dialogue between members of the parliament in Minsk and the excluded opposition, thus supporting the development of democracy, which will bring Belarus closer to the Baltic Sea region. Democracy in Belarus is in retreat after the presidential elections in December 2010, and therefore it is necessary to continue to support and maintain contact with opposition parties and other groups working for human rights.

Means

This co-operation takes the form of meetings and round-table discussions. In 2007–2010, the Nordic Council, in co-operation with the Baltic Assembly, organised four round-table discussions with Belarusian politicians from both opposition parties and parties represented in the parliament in Minsk. The most recent discussion was held in Minsk in 2010. The Nordic Council Environment Committee visited Belarus in June 2008. On this occasion, the focus was on the effects of the accident at Chernobyl nuclear power station, which hit areas of southern Belarus hard. The Nordic Council participated as an observer in the parliamentary elections in September 2008.

The situation worsened in Belarus after the 2010 presidential elections. It is still not clear what activities it will be possible to arrange in future. The parliamentary elections in September 2012 further contributed to this uncertainty. In autumn 2011, a seminar was held in Vilnius, attended by representatives of opposition groups and human-rights organisations. The Nordic Council, in co-operation with the Baltic Assembly, will hold a new seminar in Vilnius. Depending on developments in Belarus, parliamentarians from Minsk who are not on the EU's blacklist may be able to participate in future seminars. The proposal to establish a Nordic Council of Ministers' office in Minsk has been postponed. However, the Nordic Council of Ministers' office in Lithuania is engaged in Belarusian activities, particularly in relation to the exile university EHU.

Other international contacts

Objectives

In the last few years, most of the Nordic Council's international activities have focused on the areas mentioned above, but there has also been contact with other parliamentary organisations. Co-operation has been closest in the neighbouring regions in the North Atlantic and Northern Europe, but some of the committees have also had contact with, e.g. UN organisations and the Council of Europe. Relevance is key to the committees' choice of areas in which to cultivate contacts.

Means

Relations with the outside world take a range of different forms. In some cases, it is important just to have contact through face-to-face discussion at sessions or other important meetings. In other cases, there is need for frequent exchanges of information and statements. It is also essential that

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we maintain close ties in order to co-ordinate views and political input. In all cases, rapporteurs can be nominated to follow up on international strategy. The closer the co-operation with the selected partners, the more there is a need for active rapporteurs or observers from the Presidium and the committees.

In Northern Europe, the Nordic Council has again strengthened its co-operation with the Benelux parliament. In the last few years, there has also been a certain amount of contact with the *British Irish Parliamentary Assembly*, BIPA. Ever since the economic crisis hit Ireland, BIPA has concentrated on internal conditions, but several government-level meetings have been held involving the Nordic and the Baltic states, as well as Great Britain. There may also be potential in further developing these contacts at parliamentary level.

In the last few years, the new parliamentary regional organisations – in particular, parts of the former Soviet Union and the Balkans – have exhibited a growing interest in learning from established Nordic co-operation. The same also looks like it will be the case in the Mediterranean following the Arab spring. It is encouraging to share experiences with new actors who have chosen to seek inspiration from the Nordic co-operation.

As far as initiatives for parliamentary co-operation in the Balkans are concerned, the Nordic Council is in a position to help by promoting the concept and by contributing its skills. One option would be a tour of relevant capitals in the region by the President or Vice-President of the Nordic Council to address seminars about the 60 years of official Nordic co-operation.

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