

Priority Issues 2006 in Nordic - Baltic Parliamentary Cooperation ("Action Plan 2006")

1. Aim

The overall aim of this Action Plan is to provide a framework and a general direction for Baltic – Nordic parliamentary cooperation in 2006. The Action Plan is a step in the implementation of the Report of the Joint Baltic Assembly – Nordic Council Ad Hoc Group, which was adopted during the 5th Joint Meeting on 28 April 2005.

2. Objective and Areas of Cooperation

The overall objective of Nordic – Baltic parliamentary cooperation is to promote democratic, socio-economic and cultural development of the Baltic Sea and Northern European regions and to act as a vocal advocate of the specific challenges in both regions.

There are three overarching areas of Nordic – Baltic parliamentary cooperation:

- **Strengthening socio-economic integration in the Baltic Sea region.**
- **Contributing to bridge-building to EU's new neighbours.**
- **Promoting a comprehensive approach to the challenges of the Northern region.**

3. Priority Issues in 2006

The three overarching cooperation areas can be broken down into specific issues or projects. The priority issues for the presidiums and the committee's joint activities during 2006 are listed in section 3.1 – 3.6 below.

Rapid developments in politics demand rapid response. The actual forms of Baltic – Nordic parliamentary cooperation should be streamlined and adapted to the new situation. The general drive should be towards flexible, targeted and result-oriented modes of cooperation. Preferably, joint efforts should be focused on a limited number of issues each year.

In December 2006, Nordic Council and Baltic Assembly will hold a "summit". On that occasion, reports on the activities during 2006 will be submitted, and priorities for the following year will be adopted.

3.1 Presidiums of the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council

Main Cooperation Issue in 2006

It is an overarching task for Baltic – Nordic parliamentary cooperation to contribute to bridge-building and cooperation between the EU, Russia and other eastern neighbours. Networking is a means of fostering parliamentary democracy, economic development, good governance and social welfare. The combination of Nordic- Baltic experience of parliamentary cooperation and Baltic experience of interaction with Russia offers a potential comparative advantage that could be an asset in a wider European perspective.

Bridge-building could consist of several different activities. Examples of such activities are:

- Developing ways for enhancing cooperation and initiatives **on political and economic issues** such as good governance, legislation process, business development, environmental protection, infrastructure, health and social care, and others, like cultural issues;
- Developing ways for providing political support to the development of civil society and **NGO networks** in the region;
- Defining ways of promoting measures to strengthen the **security of citizens** against a wide range of threats, including organized crime and corruption;

Objective of Cooperation in 2006

The objective of cooperation between the presidiums in 2006 is to define overall guidelines and concrete measures for the development of a trilateral dialogue between Baltic Assembly, Nordic Council and Russian parliamentary bodies.

A long-term option that could be considered is the establishment of a joint Nordic – Baltic – Russian working group to elaborate priorities and forms of cooperation.

Main Mode of Cooperation in 2006

A joint Nordic – Baltic working group should be established, preferably in December 2005. The task of the working group should be to elaborate proposals for guidelines for a trilateral dialogue.

The proposals should encompass both issues of cooperation and practical modes of cooperation. The underlying notion should be that the proposals are feasible.

Primary cooperation issues, to be developed by the working group, include (but are not limited to) environmental issues, good governance, NGO development and networking, security of citizens, and cultural issues (also to be treated by the Cultural Committees, see section 3.2).

The group should consist of 3-4 members each from Nordic Council and Baltic Assembly presidiums. Members of relevant Committees could also be added to the working group on a permanent or temporary basis.

The working group should meet regularly throughout 2006, preferably in connection with other meetings between Baltic Assembly and the Nordic council. If appropriate, the group could consider calling in external experts or arranging hearings to obtain information.

During the course of its work, it is advisable that the group maintains regular contacts with Russian parliamentary bodies, i.e. the Council of Federation, the State Duma and the Parliamentary Association of North-West Russia (PANWR) in order to keep them informed about the scope and progress of the group's work. When appropriate, representatives of these bodies could be invited to participate in the meetings of the working group.

The Baltic Assembly and Nordic Council secretariats are jointly responsible for the administration, preparations and continuity of the working group's activities.

Tentatively, the working group should be able to commence its work in early 2006 and to submit its proposals for adoption at the Nordic Council – Baltic assembly Summit on December 13, 2006.

3.2 Baltic Assembly Education, Science and Culture Committee and Nordic Council Culture, Education and Training Committee

Main Cooperation Issue in 2006

The two committees have for the past two years focussed on issues relating to quality of education. The cooperation activities have included hosting a conference on quality of education, study trips and seminars, and the committees have been important contributors toward the establishment of a Baltic-Nordic area for education and research. After concluding their work on quality of education with a seminar in Karlstad in September, the two committees are in the process of evaluating new areas of cooperation for the coming year(s).

Objective of Cooperation in 2006

The overarching aim of cooperation is to maintain long-term, network co-operation in the entire field of education and research, i.e. all education and research ranging from basic to higher education. Furthermore, the committees aim at opening up new areas of cooperation, for instance within the field of culture.

Main Modes of Cooperation in 2006

Meetings of the committees and/or meetings between their chairpersons. Regular exchange of information (on the topicalities, on the activities of the committees)

3.3 Baltic Assembly Environmental Protection and Energy Committee and Nordic Council Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Main Cooperation Issues in 2006

- Combating Eutrophication in the Baltic Sea
- Baltic Sea environment and shipping

Objectives of Cooperation in 2006

Eutrophication is a serious threat to the environment, fisheries, biodiversity, and outdoor recreation of the Baltic Sea which is of great importance for all the countries bordering the sea. The two committees together - and preferably also in collaboration with other parliamentarians from countries bordering the Baltic Sea – will get acquainted with the status of eutrophication, develop policies to mitigate the situation, and hence raise the political focus in their respective parliaments and governments on ways to solve the problem.

Safe and environmentally sound **shipping** of the Baltic Sea is of the greatest concern of the two committees. To accomplish the previous Memorandum of Understanding of 2003, the two committees will follow the achieved progress of the Baltic Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area, PSSA designated by the IMO. Specifically the function and efficiency of the proposed associated protective measures, APMs will be watched. The two committees also jointly will scrutinize the achievements of governments, EU and HELCOM in dealing with other aspects of the environmentally sound navigation of the Baltic Sea. Whenever relevant, the two committees will address governments and/or international organisations responsible in this field.

The committees will closely follow the development of the project of **constructing a gas pipeline** on the bed of the Baltic Sea, particularly as concerns its possible impact on the marine environment.

Main Modes of Cooperation in 2006

Meetings of the committees and/or meetings between their chairpersons. Regular exchange of information (on the topicalities, on the activities of the committees)

3.4 Baltic Assembly Economic Affairs, Communications and Informatics Committee and Nordic Council Business and Industry Committee

Main Cooperation Issues in 2006

- Nordic - Baltic labour market relations

Objective of Cooperation in 2006

Free movement of labour as a natural consequence of EU enlargement will also exert pressure on the Nordic and Baltic labour markets due to the migration of better qualified and flexible labour force, and cross-border movement of labour within the Northern European countries. Although situations and applicable measures in Nordic - Baltic labour markets might differ, some kind of cooperation framework among the Baltic and Nordic countries is needed in order to serve as the starting point for future work on labour market issues.

Main Modes of Cooperation in 2006

Meetings of the committees, meetings of the chairpersons of the committees regular exchange of information (on the topicalities, on the activities of the committees).

3.4 Baltic Assembly Legal Affairs and Security Committee and Nordic Council Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee

Main Cooperation Issue in 2006

- Fight against trafficking in human beings

Objective of Cooperation in 2006

Trafficking in human beings is a complex crime, rooted in poverty, marginalization and ideas about the subordination of women and children, which makes them an easy target for traffickers. Ultimately, it is a crime that stems from an inadequate protection of human rights. Tackling the growing problem of trafficking requires an international and multidisciplinary approach involving all relevant stakeholders (e.g. NGOs and social authorities, law enforcement and migration authorities). Two respective committees have already started cooperation in this field but there are many aspects in which cooperation has to be strengthened and intensified in order to prevent trafficking in human beings.

Main Modes of Cooperation in 2006

Meetings of the committees, meetings of the chairpersons of the committees' regular exchange of information (on the topicalities, on the activities of the committees).

3.5 Baltic Assembly Social Affairs Committee and Nordic Council Welfare Committee

Main Cooperation Issue in 2006

- Movement of labour forces and social consequences.

Objective of Cooperation in 2006

Free movement of labour as a natural consequence of EU enlargement will exert pressure on the Nordic and Baltic labour markets due to the migration of better qualified and flexible labour force. The cross-border mobility of people within the Northern European countries will challenge the ability to provide good welfare services. Although situations and applicable measures in Nordic - Baltic labour markets might differ, some kind of cooperation among the Baltic and Nordic countries is needed in order to serve as the starting point for future work on issues regarding labour market and welfare services.

Main Modes of Cooperation in 2006

Meetings of the committees, meetings of the chairpersons of the committees' regular exchange of information (on the topicalities, on the activities of the committees)

4. Reporting

The first Baltic Assembly – Nordic Council Summit (as proposed in the AHG report) will be arranged on **December 13, 2006**. Participants in the summit will be the presidencies of the Presidiums and the Committees. Other members could be called in as appropriate.

The purpose of the summit is twofold: to present reports from presidencies on the work and achievements of the work in 2006, and to discuss and adopt priorities for cooperation in the coming year.

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