

JOINT ACTION PLAN 2007
FOR BALTIC ASSEMBLY - NORDIC COUNCIL COOPERATION

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1. Aim

The overall aim of this Action Plan is to provide a framework and a general direction for co-operation between the Baltic Assembly (BA) and the Nordic Council (NC) in 2007. The Action Plan is a step in the implementation of the Report of the Joint Baltic Assembly-Nordic Council Ad Hoc Working Group adopted during the 5th Joint Meeting on 28 April 2005.

2. Guidelines for BA-NC Co-operation in 2007

2.1 Objectives

The overall objective of BA-NC co-operation is to promote a democratic, socio-economic and cultural development of the Baltic Sea Region and to act as a vocal advocate of its specific challenges and possibilities. There are three overarching areas of Nordic-Baltic parliamentary co-operation:

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

2.2 Modes of co-operation

The general drive should be towards flexible, targeted and result-oriented modes of co-operation. Practical co-operation activities should be feasible and have a reasonable chance of successful execution. The following criteria could be used when considering possible joint co-operation activities. The activities should:

- be based upon a joint analysis of possible co-operation issues;
- be agreed upon, prepared and carried out jointly;
- be of relevance for the regular work of committees;
- have a clear and agreed division of responsibilities;
- have a true joint ownership and be built upon a commitment by all participants;
- provide added value to Nordic-Baltic parliamentary co-operation;
- prioritise the issues that warrant cross-committee approaches;
- consider participation of MPs from a wider regional base.

The Presidiums and Committees of the BA and the NC regularly attend each other's sessions, meetings, conferences and similar events. Moreover, the Presidiums and Committees occasionally arrange their own meetings within the overall framework of such joint activities. It is common for representatives of both organisations to deliver a greeting speech or to make other contributions during the events. However, it should be emphasised that an invitation to attend a meeting should not in itself be understood as a request for more substantial contributions as regards planning, preparation or participation in the event. Such deeper commitments require prior discussions and agreements, in accordance with the criteria above.

3. Joint Seminars between the Committees of the Baltic and the Nordic Parliaments

In addition to the planned co-operation between the BA and the NC in 2007, the BA and the NC will also promote co-operation between the Nordic and the Baltic parliaments. The project of launching a series of joint seminars between the committees of the Nordic and the Baltic parliaments was initiated by deliberations between the Speakers of the Nordic parliaments and the President of the Nordic Council. It is also founded on previous discussions between the Speakers of the Nordic parliaments and the Speakers of the Baltic Parliaments.

It is fundamentally important that the seminars are based on a genuine commitment from the national parliaments and their committees. Therefore, a decisive first step is to gather information from the national committees on what issues they would see as relevant to deal with in a joint Nordic-Baltic parliamentary context.

This process was initiated during the autumn of 2006. A “Group of 4” will meet in early 2007 to decide on the topics for the seminars. The group will include one representative each from the Baltic Assembly, the Nordic Council, the Baltic parliaments and the Nordic parliaments. The Nordic Council will be responsible for practical execution of the seminars.

The seminar series could start in the autumn of 2007. It is envisaged that the seminar attendance will be four participants from each of the Nordic and the Baltic parliaments together with four participants each from the BA and the NC, which is 40 participants in total for each seminar.

4. Priority Issues in BA-NC Cooperation in 2007

The priority issues for joint activities of the Presidiums and the Committees during 2007 are listed in sub-sections 4.1 – 4.6 below.

4.1 The Presidiums of the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council

The overarching aim of co-operation in 2007 is to maintain and develop long-term co-operation in the Baltic-Nordic region, and to develop the network of contact with other parliamentary actors in the Baltic Sea Region. The Presidiums should promote an intensified feedback between the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council on the one hand, and the national parliaments of the Baltic and the Nordic countries on the other. The Presidiums will thus assume a leading and driving role in the preparation and execution of the Joint Seminar Series described in Section 3 above.

Moreover, the Presidiums have an overall responsibility for developing contacts with Russian parliamentarians and parliamentary bodies. This should primarily be carried out within the framework of larger structures, such as the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC). Possible topics to address in this context include (but are not limited to) environmental and marine issues in

the Baltic Sea Region, good governance, NGO development and networking, security of citizens, and cultural issues.

4.2 The Baltic Assembly Education, Science and Culture Committee and the Nordic Council Culture, Education and Training Committee

For the past two years, the two committees have focussed on issues relating to the quality of education. The co-operation activities have included conferences on the quality of education, study visits and seminars, and the committees have significantly contributed to the establishment of the Baltic-Nordic area for education and research.

The overarching aim of co-operation in 2007 is to maintain long-term co-operation in the entire field of education and research, and to focus more deeply on issues relating to the preservation of cultural heritage and the relationship between cultural heritage and creative/cultural industries. Other issues concerning how cultural industries are becoming important components of the economies in the region will be considered by the committees.

4.3 The Baltic Assembly Environmental Protection and Energy Committee and the Nordic Council Environment and Natural Resources Committee

For the past two years, the two committees have focussed on a wide range of issues such as combating eutrophication in the Baltic Sea, constructing of a gas pipeline, the Baltic Sea environment and shipping, etc.

In November 2006, the two committees started drafting a new Memorandum of Understanding supplementing the previous Memorandums of Understanding of 2003 and 2005. The new Memorandum of Understanding is expected to be adopted in January 2007 and will address energy and eutrophication issues.

The overarching aim of co-operation in 2007 is to concentrate on sustainable energy production and consumption, including energy safety and energy supply security issues. These issues will also be discussed within a Baltic Sea Region perspective as well as a European perspective. A study visit to Denmark concerning energy efficiency issues is planned for 2007. Work on eutrophication of the Baltic Sea will be continued under the auspices of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference Working Group.

4.4 The Baltic Assembly Economic Affairs, Communications and Informatics Committee and the Nordic Council Business and Industry Committee

A natural and intended consequence of EU enlargement is a free movement of labour. This will, however, also exert pressure on the Nordic and Baltic labour markets, due to the migration of qualified and flexible labour force. It is also likely that it will generate increased cross-border movement of labour within the Northern European countries.

The overarching aim of co-operation in 2007 is to concentrate on labour market relations and mobility within a European perspective (illegal labour, mobility and flexibility). The committees plan to elaborate two concept papers: one concerning a possible meeting between the Economic Affairs committees in the BA and the NC in April, and another one – the consequences of labour market mobility.

4.5 The Baltic Assembly Legal Affairs and Security Committee and the Nordic Council Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee

For the past two years, the two committees have focussed on trafficking in human beings, which is a complex crime rooted in poverty, marginalisation and ideas about the subordination of women and children, which makes them targets for traffickers.

The overarching aim of co-operation in 2007 is to continue a discussion on the issues of trafficking in persons for the black labour market as well as illegal and legal migration. Under the European campaign against domestic violence, the BA Legal Affairs and Security Committee, the NC Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee together with the BA Social Affairs Committee and the NC Welfare Committee will focus on the issues of domestic violence.

4.6 The Baltic Assembly Social Affairs Committee and the Nordic Council Welfare Committee

For the last two years, NC-BA co-operation, under the flag of the two committees working in the field of social issues, has focused on alcohol policies in the Nordic and the Baltic countries and the movement of labour forces and services. The latter topic has been in co-operation with the Nordic Council Business and Industry Committee and the Baltic Assembly Economic Affairs, Communications and Informatics Committee.

The overarching aim of co-operation in 2007 is to focus on domestic violence, family policy, children's policy, and social institutions. Under the European campaign against domestic violence, the NC Welfare Committee together with the BA Social Affairs Committee and the NC Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee and the BA Legal Affairs and Security Committee will focus on the issues of domestic violence.

5. Annual Summit 2007

In December 2007, the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly will hold a summit. On that occasion, reports on the activities during 2007 will be submitted, and priorities for the following year will be adopted. The purpose of the summit is twofold: to present reports from presidencies on the work and achievements of the work in 2007, and to discuss and adopt priorities for co-operation in the forthcoming year.

Vilnius, 15 December 2006