

JOINT ACTION PLAN 2010 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 cooperation between the Baltic Assembly (BA) and the Nordic Council (NC) in 2010.

2. Guidelines for BA-NC Cooperation in 2010

2.1 Objectives

The overall objective of the BA –NC cooperation is to promote a comprehensive approach towards the challenges of the region. BA – NC cooperation aims at enabling joint approaches to the opportunities and challenges of globalisation in the aftermath of the economical crisis. The cooperation between the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly is getting more pragmatic and result oriented. Priority must be given to themes where the mutual benefits for the countries and citizens are greatest.

There are three overarching priorities for Nordic-Baltic parliamentary cooperation in the coming period. They should serve as a backdrop for the identification and choice of cooperation activities between committees:

- **Strategic cooperation between the Baltic and Nordic countries;**
- **Safe society and quality of life;**
- **Promoting relations with EU's new neighbours.**

2.2 Modes of co-operation

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

The activities should:

- prioritise issues that warrant cross-committee approaches;
- 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;
- give feedback to standing committees of Nordic – Baltic national parliaments;
- to the extent possible, be coordinated with activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Baltic Council of Ministers.

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 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 cooperation between the BA and the NC in 2010, the BA and the NC are ready to promote cooperation between the committees of the Nordic and the Baltic parliaments. The idea of launching a series of joint seminars between the committees of the Nordic and the Baltic parliaments was initiated some years ago by deliberations between the Speakers of the Nordic parliaments and the President of the Nordic Council. Two seminars have been conducted so far: one on Energy in 2007, and one on Labour Market issues in 2008. It is important that the national parliaments and their committees are the owners of the seminar initiative, and that the proposal to arrange a seminar should come from them. But the Presidiums are ready to assume a coordinating role in the preparation and execution of new joint committee seminars if such seminars should be organized.

4. Priority Issues in BA-NC Cooperation in 2010

The priority issues for joint activities of the Presidiums and the Committees during 2010 are listed in sub-sections 4.1 – 4.6 below.

4.1 The Presidiums of the Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council

The Presidiums have designated two main priorities in their cooperation in 2010:

- **Strategic cooperation between the Baltic and Nordic countries**
- **Promoting relations with EU's new neighbours**

Strategic cooperation between the Baltic States and the Nordic countries must be seen in a new light 6 years after the EU enlargement and after the economical crisis, that has shown the importance of strong cooperation between neighbouring countries. Regional competitiveness must be promoted. Closer integration and partnership are of importance.

Nordic Council and Baltic Assembly have jointly organized seminars in Vilnius in 2007, 2008 and 2009 with participation of Belarusian representatives both from the Parliament and opposition parties not elected to the Parliament. The next roundtable seminar is planned to be held in Minsk 22-23 March 2010. It is planned there will also be organized a similar seminar for young politicians – intentionally in Vilnius in the summer of 2010. The new EU Eastern Partnership may open up for new possibilities in order to get a better relation to the neighbour to the East, even if the development in Belarus must be watched carefully. Cooperation with EU's new neighbours can also be seen within the context of a wider conception of international security, in which the threats against society and its integrity consist of a complex compound of military, political, economic, social, environmental and other components. Presidiums will consider a suitable format for addressing the issue of a comprehensive international security concept taking into account the new Stoltenberg report about Nordic foreign and security policy co-operation.

The EU Baltic Sea Strategy embraces several areas, such as environment, economy, culture and security. Many of these will be addressed in the cooperation between BA and NC committees.

Presidiums will 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 Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council will together with the Benelux Parliament organize a trilateral meeting in Norway in April 2010. The Baltic Assembly and the Nordic Council are both engaged in BSPC, and will meet at the conference on Åland in August.

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

During 2009 both committees have focused on innovation, research and creative industries. Innovation, research, new technologies are significant resources to promote dynamics of sustainable development. Parliamentary cooperation of both committees in the fields of life long learning and adult education is of importance to strengthen comprehensive competitiveness of the region.

The overarching aim of cooperation in 2010 is to focus on **research and flexible education**. In the current time of economic crisis it is important to develop flexible strategies for correlation between research and business as well as in regard to the innovations and business. It is necessary to identify to what extent the proposed closer horizontal collaboration between universities, research institutions, businesses, national ministries and other official bodies might and have been fulfilled.

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

During 2009 both committees cooperated on sustainable energy and climate solutions by special emphasis on energy security, safe and sustainable energy supply and energy scenarios. Both Committees

were active partners in the BSPC Working Group on Energy and Climate change focusing on energy saving and efficiency issues, renewable energy sources and elaborating policy directions for climate mitigation.

Jointly with the BA Economic Affairs, Informatics and Communications Committee and the NC Business and Industry Committee both committees will focus on **sustainable and environmentally friendly transport and infrastructure development**.

Both the BA and NC Environmental Committee will focus on **climate change**. The NC Committee will have an arctic perspective and will look at sustainable use of resources. The BA Committee will look at climate change as an opportunity for development. It includes development of an environmentally friendly and sustainable transportation system and infrastructure and development of bio fuel. **Energy** will still be on the agenda including movement toward a common energy market; interconnections not only for electricity but also for gas and renewable energy resources.

Implementation and follow up of the decisions of the BSPC working group on Energy and Climate will be also one of the main tasks of both committees.

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

The aim of cooperation in 2009 was to concentrate on **transport policy and infrastructure**. A common meeting was postponed, but is now planned for 2010. The goals of cooperation in this field is to outline and develop policy solutions for better transport infrastructure among Baltic - Nordic countries and climate friendly solutions to transport policy and infrastructure. The BA Environmental Protection and Energy Committee and the NC Environment and Natural Resources Committee will be involved.

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

In 2009 the two committees have focused on challenges and problems of the Schengen System, asylum seekers and migration policies. Implementation of conclusions of the trilateral conference on the fight against trafficking in human beings was also one of the tasks of both committees.

The overarching aim of cooperation in 2010 is to focus on **safe societies which include migration, crime prevention and minority rights**.

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

In 2009 both committees focused on flexibility of the labour market, social security, social welfare, challenges of the economic situation to the labour market. Implementation of conclusions of the trilateral conference on the fight against trafficking in human beings and conclusions of the second Nordic – Baltic parliamentary seminar on labour market on labour forces migration, social security and social welfare were also tasks of both committees.

The overarching aim of cooperation in 2010 is to focus on **health care, life quality and social situation after the economic recession.**

Implementation and follow up of the decisions of the BSPC working group on Labour Market and Welfare will be also one of the main tasks of both committees.

5. Annual Summit 2010

The annual summit of the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly will be held in February 2010, postponed from December 2009. On that occasion, reports on the activities during 2009 will be submitted, and priorities for 2010 will be adopted. The purpose of the summit is twofold: to present reports from presidencies on the work and achievements of the work in 2009, and to discuss and adopt priorities for cooperation this year. The next annual summit is planned to take place on 7 – 8 December 2010 in Helsinki.

Helgi Hjörvar
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