



ACTION PLAN FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN THE NORDIC COUNCIL AND THE BALTIC ASSEMBLY IN 2016-2017

Introductory remarks

Parliamentary cooperation between the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly is a tool to meet problems and current economic, security, climate and other challenges which the Nordic and Baltic countries are facing as well as a tool to promote competitiveness and welfare of the whole Region. Pursuing joint policies and uniting resources, the Nordic and Baltic countries can face the challenges and exploit opportunities presented by the current internal and external environment.

The Nordic and Baltic countries are equal partners; our individual achievements contribute to the future of the entire Region. Ties that connect the Nordic and Baltic countries are based on shared values and inspired by the mutual understanding. The Nordic-Baltic region is characterised by stability, dialogue and cooperation; its trademarks are quality and a high sense of responsibility in politics, economics and finance. The Nordic and Baltic approach towards regional cooperation is regarded as a role model by other countries.

Cooperation between the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly should focus even more on practical partnerships and the establishment of practical Nordic-Baltic networks in areas that have the most direct national impact. The overarching objective should be to actively involve the standing committees of national parliaments, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Baltic Council of Ministers in order to create a comprehensive cooperation network, reciprocal ties, as well as to facilitate the exchange of information, experience and best practices.

Closer interaction and pooling of resources among the Baltic and Nordic countries was especially stressed by the NB8 Wise Men Report. Nordic and Baltic parliamentarians will continue their work on promoting the implementation of proposals of the NB8 Wise Men Report.

Priorities of the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly in 2016-2017

In 2016-2017, cooperation between the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly will be devoted to even greater interaction among the Nordic and Baltic countries aimed at ensuring cohesive, effective, outreaching and inclusive regional cooperation, as well as attempts to raise the Region's European and global profile and strengthen the position of the Nordic and Baltic countries in Europe and global arena.

The overarching priority of cooperation between the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly will be smart, responsible and sustainable cooperation aimed to promote welfare, safety and competitiveness of the Region.

Through close coordination based on mutual trust, shared values and common vision, cooperation between the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly in 2016-2017 will focus on the following priority areas:

1. Open Nordic-Baltic Region

In order to have a stable Europe, it is important to improve cooperation with the Eastern neighbours of the EU. It is important to support countries of the EU Eastern Partnership in order to strengthen democracies being built up under difficult circumstances. A strong and lasting democracy is not built in a short time, but in the long run a well rooted democracy is no doubt the best for the citizens. Internal trust gives the society better conditions.

The Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly will continue to develop contacts with the EU Eastern Partnership countries thus helping these countries to strengthen their commitment towards democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as a commitment towards a market economy, sustainable development and good governance.

In 2014, the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly have developed a parliamentary forum by involving parliamentarians from Visegrad, Benelux, GUAM countries. In 2015, the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly have established contacts with parliamentarians from the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly. It will be possible to build on these networks to strengthen parliamentary cooperation involving EU Eastern Partnership countries that seems eager to learn about the Baltic and Nordic experiences. Since 2007, the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly have seen annually arranged Belarus seminar involving NGOs and opposition groups from Belarus and international partners. In 2007-2010, also MPs from the Parliament in Belarus were invited, and the two organisations can each discuss if such contacts could be explored again.

2. Represented Nordic-Baltic Region

Regional cooperation has gradually become an integral part of European policy, both politically and strategically. This is especially true in fields where the Nordic and Baltic countries have common interests. Nordic-Baltic cooperation can bring added value in the drafting of European policies. Comprehensive political cooperation and coordination is increasingly necessary to defend the region's interests both within the EU and in other international organisations. To ensure an effective Nordic-Baltic region, there must be close contacts with the European Parliament and other EU institutions.

In 2015, the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly have held first consultations with the Members of the European Parliament elected from the Nordic and Baltic countries. This format of cooperation has to be intensified and enlarged. Representation of the Nordic-Baltic interests within the EU institutions has to be based on mutual interests and with more focused agendas.

3. Secure Nordic-Baltic Region

The Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly will continue to strengthen a secure and safe Nordic-Baltic region in a united Europe. There is a need to elaborate horizontal and crosscutting approach to deal with complex challenges of internal security.

It is important to develop and expand parliamentary contacts in Europe facing a worsening security situation. It is important to focus on the following agenda:

- Joint actions against tax fraud – tax evasion, smuggling, VAT fraud, undeclared income, illegal employment
- A well-organised migration process and streamlined migration policy;

- Improved cooperation of law enforcement institutions to elaborate joint actions to fight serious cross border crime;
- Fight against trafficking in human beings;
- Joint actions in the field of cybersecurity.

4. Growing and credible Nordic-Baltic Region

The world's political and economic environment has changed substantially in recent years. Competition is becoming increasingly intense, especially from fast-growing economies. On the whole, the Nordic and Baltic countries have benefited from the open markets, globalisation and international competition within global markets. Innovation, digital single market, research will be one of the main concepts behind the broad business policy and new social thinking. In order to penetrate emerging and most rapidly developing markets, the Nordic and Baltic countries have to combine the efforts to develop joint concepts, exchange ideas and best practices to become more competitive.

The Nordic Council at its Session in Reykjavik on 29 October 2015 decided to reform its structure. In the future there will be 4 committees instead of 5 and still a Presidium being in overall charge of international cooperation. It will be important to let the new committees in the Nordic Council develop contacts with the corresponding committees in the Baltic Assembly. On the Presidium level, the cooperation has expanded over the last two years, but on the committee level, there is room for improvement.

It is important to focus on the following agenda:

- Economic cooperation, joint measures to promote economic growth;
- Labour market – posted workers, youth unemployment, involvement of economically inactive people;
- Development of the EU's Digital Single Market;
- Sustainable use of natural resources;
- Development of low-carbon economy and society;
- Nordic-Baltic cooperation in energy security and security of supply;
- Waste policies, recycling and reuse;
- Closer cooperation of the municipalities in frontier regions;
- Health care and social policy, e-health and implementing the EU's directive on cross-border healthcare;
- Protection of European values in the common Nordic-Baltic information area, strategic communication, cultural integration and educational cooperation;
- Enhancing integrated and stable financial markets of the Baltic and Nordic countries.

Vilnius, 7 December 2015