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Title	Guidelines for the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from 2014
Submitted by	Secretariat
Summary / Note	-
Requested action	For information

These guidelines were approved by the Council of Ministers for Nordic Co-operation (MR-SAM) on 2 July 2013 and by the Session of the Nordic Council on 30 October 2013

Guidelines for the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from 2014

Since 1991, the Nordic Council of Ministers has built up close co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The Council of Ministers would now like to consolidate and expand this co-operation in order to help create a strong Baltic Sea Region and reduce the welfare gap between the countries in the region. The co-operation is based on shared values concerning human rights, tolerance, equality and good governance.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania supplements the bilateral co-operation between the five Nordic countries and the three Baltic countries and covers areas where Nordic synergies provide greater benefit than a bilateral approach. It also helps establish networks and exchanges of information and experiences between the countries, which enhances the Nordic/Baltic sense of affinity and mutual understanding.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania must not overlap with existing forums for regional co-operation. It is designed to help facilitate broader regional co-operation and create synergies by supplementing and expanding existing networks in the region. It should strengthen the Northern Dimension and the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy and other overarching regional policy frameworks in the Baltic Sea Region. The Council of Ministers enjoys particularly close co-operation with the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS).

Implementation

The ministers for Nordic co-operation have primary responsibility for the Council of Ministers' co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and provide overall co-ordination.

Within the framework of formal co-operation between the Nordic countries in the Council of Ministers, work in many areas takes place between sectoral ministries and committees of senior officials and the corresponding ministries and officials in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The work includes joint programmes, joint projects and the development and co-ordination of policies. This supports and operates in parallel with the NB8 co-operation on foreign policy and security issues between the foreign ministers of the eight countries.

Co-operation between the Nordic sectoral councils of ministers and their counterparts in the administrations of the Baltic countries is primarily political, and designed to enhance and expand collaboration in areas of relevant common interest. It can take the form of political statements, co-operation agreements or joint programmes and projects.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' offices in Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius play a key role in developing the co-operation, identifying areas of interest for the Baltic countries and highlighting opportunities for the development of Nordic/Baltic co-operation. The offices work closely with the sectoral ministerial councils in order to support their activities in the three Baltic countries. They also maintain close contact with the embassies of the Nordic countries in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and play a key co-ordinating role in the implementation of joint initiatives that generate Nordic synergies. The offices also act as programme and project administrators for Nordic projects and other projects, such as EU-projects.

The dialogue with the Nordic Council about the development of and implementation of the co-operation will be continued.

Priority areas

The Nordic Council of Ministers can work with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in any area of common Nordic/Baltic interest. Specific priorities are set out in the sectoral ministerial councils' programmes for co-operation and in the yearly business plans drawn up by the Council of Ministers' offices.

The specific activities listed in the business plans, and anchored within the relevant sectoral councils, must reflect the priorities of both the Nordic countries and the specific priorities for the cooperation of

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each Baltic country. In principle, co-operation between a sectoral ministerial council and a Baltic country is funded by the ministerial council concerned.

The focus should be on the following priority areas, in which positive developments are in the particular interests of the Nordic countries:

- Cross-border issues that impact on the Nordic and Baltic countries, such as organised crime, human trafficking and environmental matters
- Strengthening of economic and social development including Corporate Social Responsibility (CRS), demography, inter-parliamentary collaboration and NGO partnerships.

Funding

The Nordic Council of Ministers and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania work together on areas of common interest, and therefore the work should be funded accordingly. As a rule, 50/50 funding is the desirable standard for project funding, while joint programmes are funded according to a GDI ratio that reflects the relative sizes of the national economies. The co-funding of individual joint projects should be fixed by each programme, but the minimum contribution should be 30%.¹

The 50/50 funding requirement may be waived in projects involving NGOs, where co-funding is considered an advantage but not an absolute requirement.

Monitoring and evaluation

The ministers for Nordic co-operation are responsible for the overall monitoring and evaluation of the Council of Ministers' work with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. They receive an annual report from the Council of Ministers' Secretariat, which is forwarded to the Nordic foreign ministries and to the Nordic Council.

The co-operation ministers determine the need for evaluations. An external evaluation must be conducted no later than three years after the guidelines come into force and should include an assessment of the need for any revision of the guidelines. Individual initiatives and specific projects are regularly monitored and evaluated, and the experiences gained from this process are fed into the future development of the co-operation.

At a general level, the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat keeps the foreign ministries of the Baltic countries and other relevant bodies informed of activities. The Baltic partners are responsible for reporting to the relevant authorities in their respective countries.

Profiling

The profiling of co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania must comply with the Nordic Council of Ministers' general profiling and communications strategies.

Sectoral ministers and the ministers for Nordic co-operation must help raise awareness of and provide information about Nordic initiatives in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The same applies to the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat and institutions such as the offices in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in their work with the Nordic countries' representatives in the Baltic countries and with relevant Nordic, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian authorities.

¹ Individual projects are defined as stand-alone initiatives with a limited objective, a plan of activities, a budget and a limited timescale. Joint programmes are defined as programmes determined at political level between the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Baltic states, for which funding is allocated after a call for proposals. Joint programmes have a joint Nordic-Baltic steering group and the timescale is not necessarily limited.