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Title	Guidelines for the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation with North-West Russia 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 North-West Russia from 2014

Since 1995, the Nordic Council of Ministers has built up close co-operation with the regions in North-West Russia. The Council of Ministers would like to consolidate and expand this co-operation, and develop closer links between the Nordic Region and North-West Russia in order to strengthen the stability, security and development of the region and to maintain Russia's role as an active partner in the regional co-operation. The co-operation with North-West Russia also helps build a strong and cohesive Barents Region and Baltic Sea Region through establishment of networks across the region..

The Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation with North-West Russia focuses in particular on promoting democracy and civil society based on values such as human rights, equality, tolerance, the rule of law and good governance. It supplements the bilateral co-operation between Russia and the Nordic countries and covers areas where Nordic synergies provide greater benefit than a bilateral approach.

Co-operation with North-West Russia must not overlap with existing forums for regional co-operation. It is designed to help facilitate broader regional co-operation and create synergies. It helps to implement the Northern Dimension and its partnerships, the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy and other overarching regional policy frameworks. Co-operation with North-West Russia must be co-ordinated with other policy frameworks for co-operation with Russia in which the Nordic countries participate, including the Arctic Council, Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), European Union (EU), European Council, Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helcom), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Co-operation with North-West Russia takes the form of co-operation with regions bordering the Nordic countries or Baltic States: Arkhangelsk Oblast, Kaliningrad Oblast, Leningrad Oblast, Murmansk Oblast, Pskov Oblast, the Republic of Karelia and the city of St Petersburg.

Implementation

The ministers for Nordic co-operation have primary responsibility for the Council of Ministers' co-operation with North-West Russia and take care of the overall co-ordination of the work. The sectoral ministerial councils also work directly with relevant bodies in North-West Russia at federal level. They enter into their own agreements, run joint programmes and are involved in a range of projects.

The Nordic Council of Ministers' offices in North-West Russia play a key role in developing the co-operation, identifying areas of interest for public-sector and civil-society partners, and highlighting opportunities for enhancing co-operation. The offices work closely with the sectoral ministerial councils in order to support their activities in North-West Russia. They also maintain close contact with representations of the Nordic countries in Russia and play a key co-ordinating role in the implementation of joint initiatives that generate Nordic synergies. In addition, the offices 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

In principle, the Nordic Council of Ministers can work with North-West Russia in any area of common Nordic/Russian interest. One key area is promoting democracy, civil society and collaboration with NGOs, both directly and through the inclusion of NGOs in other projects that involve local and regional authorities.

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 their Russian partners.

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

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- Promoting democracy, respect for human rights and civil society by working together on democracy and good governance in local government, inter-parliamentary collaboration, media and journalist co-operation, and NGO co-operation.
- Cross-border issues that impact on the Nordic countries and North-West Russia, such as organised crime, human trafficking, contagious diseases and environmental matters.

Funding

In principle, co-operation between the Nordic Council of Ministers and North-West Russia is on areas of common interest and should be funded accordingly. As a rule, 50/50 funding is the desirable standard both for co-operation on individual projects and for larger joint programmes. The co-funding of individual joint projects should be fixed for 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 North-West Russia. 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 Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant federal organs informed of activities. The Russian authorities are responsible for reporting to the relevant bodies in Moscow.

Profiling

The profiling of co-operation with North-West Russia 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 North-West Russia. The same applies to the Nordic Council of Ministers' Secretariat and institutions such as the offices in North-West Russia in their work with the Nordic countries' representatives in Russia and with relevant Nordic and Russian 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 Russia, for which funding is allocated after a call for proposals. Joint programmes have a joint Nordic-Russian steering group and the timescale is not necessarily limited.