

International Strategy of the Nordic Council

*Adopted at the Nordic Council Theme Session
in Reykjavik, 15 March 2023*

Content

Introduction	4
Security in the Nordic region and neighbouring area	5
The rules-based world order and the Nordic model	7
Sustainable development: The Nordic region and globally	9
Particularly prioritised countries, regions, and organisations	11
Follow-up and instruments	12
About this strategy	13

This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at:
<https://pub.norden.org/politknord2023-718>

This strategy builds on the first International Strategy of the Nordic Council (2018-2022). The strategy defines the Council's strategic and long-term objectives in the international field. The strategy objectives steer the Nordic Council's international activities. The Nordic Council works closely with a number of international, regional, and national parliamentary organisations. The strategy also includes objectives and recommendations for the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic governments. Ultimate responsibility for the Nordic Council's international collaboration and matters concerning foreign, security, and defence policy lies with the Presidium.



Introduction

The world is undergoing major change. The Nordic region does not exist isolated from global events – these have a great impact on the Nordic region and the Nordic countries. Global challenges such as climate change and pandemics affect the Nordic countries' international sphere of action. The rivalry between the superpowers has been intensifying over a long period. Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has challenged the established rules-based world order based on respect for international agreements, trust, and a level playing field. With authoritarian and nationalistic regimes such as Russia, and unfortunately an increasing number of other countries, international relationships have become ever more unpredictable and unstable. International collaboration to tackle common threats has suffered because of the new security situation. The global development and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals has become more difficult. However, phenomena such as climate change and control over and disarmament of weapons of mass destruction are as urgent as ever.

The Nordic region is a strategically important area in geopolitical terms. Developments in the Baltic Sea area, the Arctic, and the North Atlantic are closely linked to one another and to the Nordic region. The Nordic countries have long been working to strengthen a rules-based order and international organisations, promoting democratic development and people's right of self-determination, and standing up for human rights. This work is becoming more important, and forms the core of the international strategy of the Nordic Council.

The Nordic Council's objective is to be an internationally known and respected actor with international activities that are based on common values, the citizens' welfare, and the region's security. In the future, the Nordic region should be the world's most integrated region, ready to act and react together to international challenges. Collaborating as a Nordic entity makes it possible to achieve results that individual Nordic countries would be unable to achieve, and in a more cost-effective way. In the current situation, we in the Nordic region are perhaps more united than ever, and Nordic citizens want even closer Nordic collaboration. Nordic solutions are increasingly in demand, and we have everything to gain from standing even more united internationally. In our international collaboration, we will share our experiences of the Nordic social model and regional collaboration, and we will actively learn from others. We will continue to work for democratic values, peacebuilding, and human rights, and we will strengthen the contact with our like-minded partners to ensure a safer, more sustainable, and more just and democratic world.

Security in the Nordic region and neighbouring area

Russia's offensive war in Ukraine fundamentally changed the European security order. As a consequence of Russian actions and the worsened security situation in Europe, Finland and Sweden have decided to apply for membership in the defence alliance, NATO. Finnish and Swedish NATO membership comprises a new situation, with new opportunities for the Nordic collaboration on defence and security policy.

Hybrid threats, cyberattacks, disinformation, and influence operations comprise a serious and growing challenge in the Nordic region and the world. As digitalised, open, and democratic societies, the Nordic countries are especially vulnerable.

The Corona pandemic showed the need for more Nordic collaboration within contingency planning. In its Strategy on Societal Security (2019), the Nordic Council called for a number of measures to improve Nordic collaboration on societal security. Promoting security in the Nordic region requires good contact with other actors in the region. The Nordic social model also comprises a pillar for societal safety and security. A stable economy has an important role in ensuring this.

The Nordic Council will therefore pursue the following objectives:

- Serve as a living forum for parliamentary debate on Nordic foreign and security policy and societal security/total defence. We will help gather the foreign and security policy expertise, and learn from the experiences of our international collaboration partners.
- Strengthen the parliamentary dimension in the Nordic defence collaboration, for example through the annual roundtable meetings with NORDEFECO.
- Promote a discussion on the role and stance of the Nordic region in the NATO defence alliance, including a focus on the Nordic region's peacekeeping role, and work for human rights.
- That issues concerning security in the Baltic Sea area, the Arctic, and the North Atlantic will be high on the agenda in the international collaboration and in the dialogue with the Baltic Assembly and other partners.
- Insist that and work to ensure that the Arctic and the North Atlantic remain a low-tension area in terms of security policy, that the Arctic cooperation remains constructive, and that the rights of indigenous peoples are respected.
- That the Nordic countries will strengthen their foreign, defence and security policy collaboration, including civil contingency that contributes to the general security. Nordic defence cooperation does not threaten anyone, but contributes to stability and predictability in the region.

- That the Nordic governments assess whether the Helsinki Agreement needs to be updated to ensure it is better adapted to the new reality regarding foreign and security policy.
- That the Nordic countries strengthen their collaboration on societal security, total defence, and critical infrastructure.
- That the Nordic countries collaborate effectively in all international organisations and are prepared, when necessary, to play their part in crisis management.
- Work to ensure that the Nordic countries take cooperation on fossil-free and renewable energy and energy security to a new level, and investigate how to further integrate and deepen Nordic energy security and general contingency regarding supply.
- Work to develop a Nordic strategy on cybersecurity.
- That the Nordic countries increasingly utilise the potential in marketing the Nordic region as a unified entity internationally. Awareness of the benefits of Nordic cooperation internationally, as well as joint Nordic promotion, is not strong enough among the Nordic governments.
- That the Nordic governments assess whether the Nordic Council of Ministers should increase support for the Nordic countries' collaboration on foreign and security policy, societal security, contingency and total defence, for example through research and other capacities.

The rules-based world order and the Nordic model

The Nordic countries' international sphere of action is best secured within the frameworks of a rules-based world order. The Nordic countries should prioritise becoming involved in the work to defend and strengthen a rules-based world order. The Nordic countries should work to prevent war and conflicts, and focus on peacekeeping and support for vulnerable areas.

The Nordic social welfare model is widely appreciated as one of the Nordic countries' most important achievements. The Nordic countries lead the way in various welfare and happiness indicators. This is closely linked to the Nordic countries being characterised by a deep respect for democracy, the rule of law, equality, and human rights. These values are under strong pressure, and the Nordic region can make a difference by always being a clear voice that stands up for these values. The Nordic region is also the region in the world with the lowest degree of corruption and the highest degree of openness and trust. This is an important reason for the economic success of the Nordic region.

The Nordic Council will therefore pursue the following objectives:

- Work to ensure that democracy, the rule of law, equality, and human rights are always high on the international agenda. The Nordic region will be in the driving seat when it comes to combating extremism, anti-democratic positions, racism, and all other forms of hate and discrimination - including on digital platforms.
- Give special attention to rights issues relating to children, women^[1] and their sexual and reproductive health and rights, LGBTQI issues, people with disabilities, and indigenous peoples.
- Work for girls' and women's self-determined right to abortion.
- Emphasise freedom of speech and freedom of the press as fundamental to successful and democratic societies, and promote measures that strengthen the democratic dialogue between citizens.
- Demand that the Nordic governments work, in consensus and purposefully, to strengthen and reform the UN and other multilateral organisations, and increase their legitimacy and sphere of action.
- Support democratic forces in authoritarian countries and continue the dialogue with representatives of the democratic opposition in Russia and Belarus, including a focus on free media.

1. At the same time, it is proven that in some areas it is boys and men who are lagging behind.

- Maintain and promote good relationships with likeminded countries, regions, and organisations, such as the Baltic Assembly, the West Nordic Council, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), the European Parliament, the Benelux Parliament, and the Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians (CPAR) in order to jointly stand up for these fundamental rights.
- Continue the inter-parliamentary work between the foreign affairs and EU committees in the Nordic region, as well as the ongoing work to put forward Nordic views in the EU Parliament, especially via Nordic members of the EU Parliament.
- Build further on transatlantic relations and collaboration with parliaments in the UK and Scotland, the German Bundestag, and the Landtag in Schleswig-Holstein.
- Strengthen the Nordic countries' profile in peace mediation and crisis management.
- Work to increase awareness of the economic and social benefits of openness and trust, and the serious social consequences of corruption.
- Use the Nordic social model actively in promoting the Nordic region internationally, and exert pressure on the Nordic governments to do the same.
- Work for more co-location of Nordic embassies/foreign missions when appropriate. In addition to cost effectiveness and economies of scale, this can promote increased professional collaboration and a stronger common Nordic identity and visibility.

Sustainable development: The Nordic region and globally

Sustainable development means the opportunity for human development within the frameworks of the Earth's carrying capacity. In addition to the environmental dimension, sustainable development also concerns social sustainability and economic sustainability. The 2030 Agenda is the UN's action plan with goals for the transition to a sustainable society. These goals should steer the Nordic countries' international activities.

The Nordic region has an ambition to become the most sustainable region in the world. We have the resources, expertise, and technology to show the way forward in the green transition in a sustainable way, with a realistic time frame and rational solutions. Together, on an international level, we will engage in dialogue about and promote the global level of ambition to stop climate change and the loss of biodiversity. As climate change accelerates, the social, economic, and environmental challenges are exacerbated. Climate change impacts food, water, and energy supplies, and contributes to greater competition for natural resources, loss of livelihoods, climate-related disasters, and enforced migration and displacement. The poorest people in the world are hit hardest, but the Nordic social welfare systems and economies are also affected by the crises.

The Nordic Council will therefore pursue the following objectives:

- Work to ensure that the Nordic countries together take a proactive role in the UN to promote sustainable development and the goals in the 2030 Agenda.
- That the Nordic countries strengthen collaboration on compliance with the Paris Agreement, the UN Agreement on Biodiversity, and the forthcoming UN agreement on plastic.
- Work for a common Nordic voice on combatting global poverty and inequality by working more closely on development policy and aid – including support for rebuilding Ukraine.
- That best practice from the Nordic region will benefit others, and that we have an active and investigative approach to learning from others.
- That Nordic countries proactively promote the green transition in a sustainable way, and accelerate the development of clean and renewable energy, thereby helping to tackle climate change and improve security of supply.

- To promote distinctive features of the Nordic region in the dialogue with other international actors, including the forest and marine industries, and work to combat antibiotic resistance.
- Have a special focus on the Arctic area and help to spread awareness of the region's vulnerability to climate change.
- Hold close and constructive dialogue with the European Parliament about the EU's energy and climate policy, and demand concrete and sustainable solutions.

Particularly prioritised countries, regions, and organisations

In its international collaboration, the Nordic Council will particularly prioritise its immediately surrounding areas, i.e., the Baltic Sea area, the Arctic, Europe, and our neighbours. The Nordic Council promotes the international strategy's objectives in its relations with other parliamentary organisations, the most important of which are the Baltic Assembly, BSPP, the European Parliament, CPAR, the West Nordic Council, and the Benelux Parliament. The Nordic Council has entered into agreements or similar on collaboration with the above parliamentary assemblies. In addition to these, the Nordic Council prioritises in its international activities a number of other regions and actors: Ukraine, Germany and Schleswig-Holstein, the UK and Scotland, the US, and Canada, and the democratic opposition in Russia and Belarus.

Follow-up and instruments

The Nordic Council will set the agenda and help ensure that the strategy is followed up through strategic use of our political instruments, including recommendations to the Nordic governments / Nordic Council of Ministers, written questions to the Nordic governments, and political dialogue and meetings with Nordic ministers. The Nordic Council will be a constructive and active participant in international forums. Conferences, seminars, and roundtable meetings, preferably in collaboration with our international partners, and active use of the Nordic Council's communication channels, play an important role. The Nordic Council's collaboration with the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic governments, and the Nordic parliaments, both on a political and administrative level, will be strengthened to ensure good follow-up and Nordic benefit. When needed, the strategy will be supplemented with concrete action plans, and the annual report will include a report on the Nordic Council's annual international activities.

About this strategy

International Strategy of the Nordic Council

PolitikNord 2023:718

ISBN 978-92-893-7547-4 PDF

ISBN 978-92-893-7548-1 ONLINE

<http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/politknord2023-718>

© Nordic Council 2023

Photos: Norden.org

Published: March 2023

Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Shared Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

Nordic Council

Nordens Hus

Ved Stranden 18

DK-1061 Copenhagen

www.norden.org

Read more Nordic publications: www.norden.org/publications