



norden

The Nordic Council

**Greeting from Mr. Helgi Hjörvar,
The President of the Nordic Council**

The Nordic Region – Norden – consists of the countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, and the autonomous regions of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands. The Nordic population of 25 million enjoys an abundance of good things: dynamic capital cities, fertile land, affluence, access to wild and beautiful nature, and plenty of space.

The Nordic countries are closely linked through their history and culture, going back a thousand years, and the current formal co-operation between them is amongst the oldest and most extensive regional co-operation in the world. The Nordic Council, a Nordic parliamentary co-operation forum, was formed in 1952 and the Nordic Council of Ministers, the equivalent co-operation between the Nordic governments, was established in 1971.

The Nordic co-operation, which enjoys widespread popular support, is built on common values and a willingness to achieve results that contribute to a dynamic development and increase Nordic competencies and competitiveness. The purpose is, on the one hand, to make it attractive to live, work and do business in the Nordic Region, and on the other hand, to strengthen the Nordic countries internationally.

This is done by formal co-operation in many areas such as, for example, research, the environment, welfare and culture. Important also is the significant informal co-operation between the Nordic countries in almost every aspect of policy, including culture, sport, business, energy and education. In recent years, the issues of globalisation, climate, safety, freedom of movement, the Arctic and financial crisis have been high on the agenda in Nordic co-operation.

The fellowship of language is one of the things that binds Nordic co-operation together. Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are so closely related that, with relatively little effort, one can learn to understand all the languages, if one speaks one of them. They are also the working languages in official Nordic co-operation. A free labour market, closely related languages and favourable rules for studying elsewhere in the Region make it easy for Nordic citizens to move between the countries.

The main characteristics of Nordic politics are parliamentarianism, democracy, a high proportion of women in the national parliaments and a developed welfare model. The Nordic countries often come out on top in international comparisons in terms of combining a high standard of living with equality and an extensive public sector.

Combining their strengths to become more dynamic in a world of globalisation, the small Nordic countries make a difference.