

Dear Minister,
Excellencies,
Professors,
Experts,

Dear Friends from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden,

The overall aim of the Nordic Council of Ministers' activities in Estonia, as well as in Latvia and Lithuania, is to contribute to the on-going discussion on how to create a region where the Nordic countries together with the Baltic States stand on stable ground. First of all we need to work even closer together – and to continue to build networks in new fields of interest.

We all – and I mean both the Nordics and Baltics – can be proud of what we have achieved so far. For example, we can see results in environmental policies and energy solutions. We have done quite well in sharing practices for education, social issues and equality, and in the fight against human trafficking. Culture too has been at the forefront of our minds in working together.

So far so good.

Today we are about to take a step forward in a new field – one in which the Nordic Council of Ministers sees the need to turn more attention to the future, with a focus on human development and migration trends in our region. Free movement is fundamental to the European Union, and it goes without saying between the Nordic countries. It has provided us with tremendous opportunities, as well as some challenges. We have to face facts, or rather figures, in statistics which have made demographic trends rather ugly.

The Nordic region has been one without borders since the 1950s.

Removing border obstacles for workers, students and companies has been a success story in the Nordics, even though it has had its share of problems and critics. And after more than half a century there is still a lot that needs to be done to achieve a truly borderless region.

Here are just two brief examples:

1. In the 1960s around 200,000 Finns moved to Sweden to assemble Volvos and Scania Trucks and gained a reputation for drinking that was expressed in just three words: *en finne igen* or "a Finn again". But on the other hand, these men and women helped Sweden make its economy the strongest in the world per capita. Only about one in four have since moved back to Finland.
2. In Norway, 300,000 new jobs have been created since 2005, of which 200,000 have been filled by people from abroad – many of them from Sweden. Today 68,000 Swedes have a tax card in Norway. This week we heard from the Norwegian business elite that the country simply can't take more. This was a surprise to all of us given the advertising campaigns that are running to encourage qualified people to move to Norway, especially among nurses in Finland. There's a lack of labour in Norway, let's be clear.

These two examples give you just a hint of the interesting trends in the Nordic countries and Baltic States that you will hear about over the next couple of days.

Dear friends,

Migration and human development tend to be sensitive issues – but they are important to all of us. In the programme of the Swedish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2013 human development is one of the cornerstones.

If we get it to work, free movement between the Nordics and Baltics will help us create a region that is even more competitive. But we have to learn from what we already know, and we have to ask ourselves what we can do together to find solutions to create the tools we need.

I'd like to thank all of you who are here today. Our main partners have been the University of Tartu and the Swedish Embassy in Tallinn. Furthermore, all of the Nordic embassies have been helpful in connecting us with specialists. Special thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Social Affairs in Estonia, and thanks also to the specialists from the University of Tallinn and the Centre for Migration Studies at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences.

The Nordic Council of Ministers will continue with series of events concerning the migration and demographic challenges in the Nordic-Baltic Region. Our offices in Vilnius and Riga are preparing seminars this year as well as we together with our good partners.

I wish you all fruitful discussions and, as always, please network!

Berth Sundström, Director of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Estonia

The 'Migration and Demographic Challenges in the Nordic-Baltic Region' on 7 & 8 March 2013, KUMU Art Museum, Tallinn