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NORDIC MODEL OF SUBREGIONAL CO-OPERATION

ABSTRACT: Nordic co-operation is renowned throughout the world and perceived as the collaboration of a group of countries which are similar in their views and activities. The main pillars of the Nordic model of co-operation are the tradition of constitutional principles, activity of public movements and organisations, freedom of speech, equality, solidarity, and respect for the natural environment. In connection with labour and entrepreneurship, these elements are the features of a society which favours efficiency, a sense of security and balance between an individual and a group. Currently, the collaboration is a complex process, including many national, governmental and institutional connections which form the “Nordic family”.

KEYWORDS: Nordic countries, sub-regional co-operation, areas of co-operation

Introduction

The Nordic countries, due to their co-operation, have taken many breakthrough steps and have rapidly reached the level which the European Union has been trying to achieve since the beginning of its existence. Nowadays, although they are not significant players on the international arena, they are important partners for a number of countries including the United States¹. Their

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¹ In September 2013, the US President Barack Obama paid his first official visit to Sweden. Obama held bilateral talks with Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt and met the heads of other Nordic governments. The talks mostly concerned economic issues, a joint engagement in human rights protection, climate protection as well as the problems of international policy and security. In a joint

collaboration takes many institutional forms and initiatives. The Nordic countries seek common solutions for the problems which are not limited by national borders or challenges of the contemporary world i.e. economic crisis, climate change, natural environment and human rights protection, and maintaining security. They hold the leadership position in the area of modern climate solutions, energy technologies and, moreover, in the conservation of the natural environment. The countries have pioneered a number of environmental protection areas due to the high level of environmental awareness in society, political engagement regarding the natural environment and solving problems connected with conservation. Nordic co-operation has impressed other European countries with their development of a common market for electricity, and the reduction in the sources of pollution. Since the mid-80s, Scandinavian countries have significantly reduced emissions of pollutants into the atmosphere and water while maintaining the economic growth on a level comparable or even higher than the OECD average. This has made the region the world leader in the area of labelling and clean technologies-Nordic Swan is one of the most renowned Scandinavian brands and at the same time one of the most recognizable eco-labels in Europe.

Scandinavian countries remain the focus of attention for researchers, writers, journalists and experts in various fields. The region has become an important subject of debate as well as scientific and political research. In science, the issue of Nordic co-operation has long been discussed. Foreign sources frequently illustrate the Nordic region in a number of aspects referring to specific policies: social – especially the welfare state, economic – in the context of innovation and competitiveness of the Nordic economies, and security and foreign policies. The history of the region, political systems, the development of institutions and

statement, the politicians emphasised the importance of co-operation between the USA and the Nordic countries as well as other partners such as the Baltic countries in the area of security and defence. It was announced that the US – Nordic Security Dialogue would be established to discuss international co-operation in the matter of global and regional security. The joint American and Swedish statement also concerned the development of relations between NATO and partner countries (Sweden among others). The importance of the work of the Arctic Council was emphasised and the necessity to increase co-operation in the area of conservation and research into the natural environment of the Arctic as well as an improvement in the living conditions and encouraging sustainable development in the Arctic with respect to indigenous communities.

co-operation are mentioned in many Polish studies concerning Northern Europe. The authors attempt to discover the source of this Nordic political and economic success. In academic literature there are interesting studies and dissertations concerning various aspects of the Northern European countries' co-operation written by W. Anioł, T. Cieślak, R.M. Czarny, Z. Doliwa-Klepacki, M. Grewiński, M. Grzybowski, A. Kubka, K. Musiał, J. Nowiak, W. Nowiak, J. Osiński, B. Piotrowski or J. Symonides.

The author realizes that the illustration of Nordic co-operation is a subject of great importance. It is also recognized that the fact that the complexity of this issue cannot capture its full range of positive and negative aspects. An example of this is the refugee crisis. It is a comprehensive issue, requiring separate studies. However, the author has decided to present this article, believing that it could be a contribution to the discussion centered around the current challenges of regional co-operation between states.

The origin of Nordic community

Scandinavia has not always been a peaceful and quiet region of Europe. The beginning of Nordic co-operation dates back to the nineteenth century when, after a few hundred years of struggle between Sweden and Denmark for the domination in the region – the period is often referred to as the “zigzag relationship” as there were alternating periods of war and solidarity, the gradual reconstruction of ties between the countries commenced (Jałowiecki, 14)². At the beginning of the twentieth century, the parliament and government co-operation – e.g. between the ministers of Social Services was initiated. Many agreements concerning social policy were signed e.g. concerning social insurances, health protection, tax insurances and compensation. The members of parliament used to meet on a regular basis at the conferences of the Scandinavian Inter-Parliamentary Union. In 1919, the NORDEN Association came into being to support co-operation between the Scandinavian countries. After the First World War, the Scandinavian countries worked

² The movement called “Scandinavism” advocating a reunion of Scandinavian countries in a form of a political union began at that time. The 19th century was abundant with agreements and contracts between the Nordic countries, among which there was an agreement of Scandinavian Monetary Union for Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

together within the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization. At that time the Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs used to meet ad hoc to exchange information and work on joint statements to be subsequently presented in the forum of the League of Nations.

The economic crisis brought a tightening of the Nordic relations. In 1930, the countries signed a convention which made it impossible to raise import duties without prior agreement (Marszałek, 197). Moreover, the Ministers of Social Services, Foreign Affairs, Trade, Education and Justice started to meet on a regular basis. The development of co-operation and Nordic integration were strongly emphasised by many associations and non-governmental organizations with the word Nordic in their names³.

After World War II, despite differences resulting from their political status, the Nordic countries decided to co-operate, mainly in the social, scientific and cultural areas, in a more formal way (Zygierewicz, 1–2). The tightening of relations which took place in the second half of the previous century was inspired by many international committees which still supervise and coordinate them (Doliwa-Klepacki, 334–56). A special role is played by the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, which are proactive and have become a driving force of the regional integration (Helsinki Treaty). After World War II, they inspired many specialised units of Nordic co-operation to be formed. The oldest ones are the following: the Nordic Committee of Tourism established in 1923, the Nordic Organisation for Scientific Research-Nordforsk established in 1947, the Nordic Liason Committee for Atomic Energy, operating since 1957, the Nordic Industrial Fund, established in 1973, promoting industrial and technological development in Scandinavian countries – since 1989 known as the Nordic Innovation Centre. Other institutions have been established due to the new directions and areas of contacts between the countries. Many of them operate regionally and illustrate that Northern Europe is indeed the region of extensive co-operation. They facilitate collaboration in many areas and are important units of the Nordic Council of Ministers as they implement its priorities (Marszałek, 198).

The Nordic countries have much in common, with similar cultures, religion, language and views concerning social policy.

³ In 1963 they formed the League of Nordic Associations whose aim was to support co-operation, cultural and economic integration by promoting the idea among the Nordic nations.

The Passport Union, stability, security and welfare, freedom of speech, solidarity, democracy, language, common culture and values are key ideas which are the result of years of co-operation and trust. These aspects engender a Nordic synergy, defining an open Scandinavian society and have become real assets in global competition.

One of the “trademarks” of Northern countries is the idea and policy of a welfare state (Nowiak *passim*, Daly *passim*, Castells, Himanen *passim*, Edvardsen, Hagtvet *passim*, Aniol *passim*). The Scandinavian model is deeply rooted in the practical co-operation of social partners with one another and with political institutions. Its idea was to minimise conflicts that occurred in the initial period of industrialisation. The region has the potential to become the world leader in innovative solutions in the health and social sectors, especially with the elderly, preventative medicine and gender equality. The view is promoted by the amount of money spent on social insurance, and compliance with the ideas of equality and civil rights. The Scandinavian model of a welfare state is an integral part of a liberal market economy. Scandinavian countries have consistently occupied the top positions in world rankings concerning the standard of living despite the ongoing economic crisis to which they seem to be resilient. This proves that the existence of a good welfare state is possible and, most importantly, that the economy with the elements of state ownership and regulations may be effective and innovative. Moreover, the extensive system of redistribution does not hamper economic development and personal freedom.

The Nordic countries, unlike others, connect a high standard of living with reasonable distribution of income-incomes are usually high and the differences in their levels relatively low in comparison to other OECD countries. The Scandinavian model of a welfare state cannot be “exported” to other countries as it requires a fundamental trust which is unique to the region. According to Christian Bjørnskov, professor at the Department of Economics and Business at the University of Aarhus, the only countries which remain on the same level of trust e.g. Canada and New Zealand may introduce a similar model of the state. He claims: “The welfare state would collapse in a country like Greece, where distrust and corruption are widespread. Countries with low trust levels tend to have more corruption because it's a very human reaction to take as much as you can if you feel that others are doing the same.” (qtd in Karkov sciencenordic.com).

The unique model of the Scandinavian welfare state is based on the common culture and values which are even more important nowadays in a global economy. These include democracy, transparency, equality, freedom, social solidarity and security for all, individualism and tolerance. The model promotes social rights and the principle that everyone is entitled to equal access to social and health services, education and culture. It also refers to the social care addressed to the outcasts and vulnerable groups of society. One of the most important obligations of a welfare state is to create opportunities for all to participate in social life and in the decision – making processes of the state.

Scandinavian labour markets also share a number of common features. They can be characterised by a high level of equality, security and consensus, which has had a huge impact on the Nordic welfare that we know today. A large number of the adult population are professionally active. Salaries and work conditions are regulated by group contracts. Trade unions and employers are engaged in creating rules concerning the labour market, which translates into a high rate of employment, and accordingly the low percentage of unemployment.

Table 1. Gini coefficient in the Nordic countries and the EU

| Country | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Denmark | .. | 0.25 | 0.24 | 0.24 | 0.24 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.27 | 0.27 | 0.28 | 0.28 |
| Faroe Islands | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. |
| Greenland | 0.33 | 0.34 | 0.34 | 0.31 | 0.33 | 0.33 | 0.34 | 0.33 | 0.33 | 0.34 | .. |
| Finland | 0.26 | 0.26 | 0.26 | 0.26 | 0.26 | 0.26 | 0.26 | 0.26 | 0.25 | 0.26 | 0.26 |
| Aland Islands | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. | .. |
| Iceland | .. | .. | 0.24 | 0.25 | 0.26 | 0.28 | 0.27 | 0.30 | 0.26 | 0.24 | 0.24 |
| Norway | .. | 0.27 | 0.25 | 0.28 | 0.31 | 0.24 | 0.25 | 0.24 | 0.24 | 0.23 | 0.23 |
| Sweden | 0.23 | .. | 0.23 | 0.23 | 0.24 | 0.23 | 0.24 | 0.25 | 0.24 | 0.24 | 0.25 |
| EU27 | .. | .. | .. | 0.29 | 0.29 | 0.30 | 0.30 | 0.30 | 0.30 | 0.31 | 0.31 |

Source: “INDIC107: Gini coefficient by reporting country”. Web 10 April 2015.
<<http://norden.statbank.dk/INDIC107>>

The high level of welfare and equality in the region, which can be illustrated by Corrado Gini coefficient – see Table 1, in

connection with a highly competitive (Schwab, weforum.org)⁴ and flexible economy and high level of active employment especially among women are specific to the Nordic countries, but they are also valuable assets in the increasingly globalised world.

The international public remain interested and poses questions concerning the sources of the Nordic model, which could be an attractive perspective for the Europe of the future. The answer is complex and is the result of many factors. It seems to lie in the pragmatic approach towards the state and its citizens. The countries take pride in the honesty and transparency of their governments which are rigorously evaluated by the voters – in Sweden everyone has access to all official documents and is entitled to control politicians' activity. Citizens pay taxes honestly and act according to the regulations, and the government's decisions are commonly accepted and followed. Scandinavian people do not regard high taxes as an element of oppression, but as their civil obligation. Protestant ethics, social solidarity and a high level of civil honesty – according to the data of *Corruption Perceptions Index 2014*⁵, the Nordic countries have the lowest rate of corruption in the world – are the main prerequisites of the positive attitude towards the high costs connected with the implementation of the Nordic welfare state (Osiński, newsweek.pl). The level of employment⁶ and flexibility on the labour market are high as is the birth rate⁷. Extensive childcare enables women to reconcile family life with work, therefore, they are able to enter the labour market and be active politically to a larger extent than in other countries. Gender equality is a key element of the Nordic identity and one of the fundamentals of sustainable societies of the North. They are one of the “healthiest” democracies and, though not without problems also connected with extremism, their answers to all forms of political violence are tolerance, freedom of speech and democracy. The Nordic societies possess

⁴ Out of 144 countries, in 2015 the Nordic countries held the following positions: Finland – 4th, Sweden – 10th, Norway – 11th, Denmark – 13th, Iceland – 30th.

⁵ Denmark held the 1st position, Finland – 3rd, Sweden – 4th, Norway – 5th, and Iceland – 12th.

⁶ According to Eurostat in 2014, in the age group of 20–64 the coefficients were as follows: 75.9% for Denmark, 73.1% for Finland, 83.5% for Iceland, 79.6% for Norway, 80% for Sweden.

⁷ In 2014 it was 1.86 in Norway, 1.73 in Denmark, 2.06 in Greenland, 1.73 in Finland, 1.88 in Iceland, 1.88 in Sweden.

two important features i.e. trust in others and belief in individual rights. The efficiency of the Nordic countries results from their positive work ethic. Their priorities are based on a deeply-rooted respect for people and nature thanks to which they have managed to sustain exceptional balance between the economic growth and conservation.

Areas of contacts between the Nordic countries

The North of Europe encompasses the countries which have deeply-rooted democratic traditions and extensive systems of social policy. Historical, cultural and linguistic analogies are the basis for Nordic co-operation, while trans-border mobility and a well-organised labour market help to enhance it. Due to years of co-operation, the level of the Nordic integration is high and concerns both formal and informal contacts between the countries. Currently, the collaboration is a complex process, including many national, governmental and institutional connections which form the “Nordic family”. The trust, which has been built in the process, allows the Nordic countries to communicate, which consequently facilitates the exchange of information and common activities in the following areas: social care, economy, ecology, global and regional safety, humanitarian aid, the UN diplomatic activity, and participation in the UN, NATO and EU operations. The united Nordic countries present their interests in the international arena more efficiently without underestimating the role of NATO or the European Union. More importantly, the Nordic ties are strong enough to co-operate though not all of the countries are member states of the EU, not all of them use the Euro as their domestic currency and not all of them are members of NATO.

The Nordic countries co-operate in many different matters. It has a large influence on the dynamics of the regional development, and increases coherence as well as competitiveness. Geographical location, a common attitude towards life and democratic traditions, ethnic, cultural, religious but also political community facilitate the co-operation, which cannot be underestimated due to its scope, the net of contacts, and frequently informal character. Nowadays, it encompasses almost all areas, from taxes and insurances to cultural issues. Culture remains one of the fundamentals of co-operation between the Nordic countries, as for a long time it

has been a platform for a better understanding of neighbouring countries and for promoting common values (Wendt *passim*).

The Nordic Council supports co-operation between the Scandinavian governments and parliaments. It is the body which initiates and advises in the matter of contacts between the countries, especially those which result from agreements between them. Co-operation is coordinated by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Its chairmanship – similarly to the Nordic Council – is a rotating one, lasts for a year and is given over to another state of the region. The presidency undertakes essential initiatives which are to provide dynamics and continuity of contacts. Moreover, it allows particular countries to have influence on the priorities of co-operation.

The Nordic countries are similar in the number of inhabitants, size and power – except for Iceland. Individually, they do not hold a strong position, but acting together in the international arena they can change and push forward their ideas in many structures i.e. the EU, NATO, OSCE or UN. It is crucial that the Nordic co-operation is not an obstacle for other sovereign and democratic countries to participate in similar global and sub-regional processes. On the contrary, participation is the indication of Nordic pragmatism and awareness.

The Nordic Council of Ministers encompasses almost all areas of international relations. Many agreements have been signed to develop co-operation in various fields, including the agreement establishing a common labour market, the agreement concerning the Passport Union, cultural and transport agreement, a convention on conservation, languages and social convention. At the beginning of its activity, the Council established the Legal Committee, whose task was to prepare projects for the Scandinavian countries' legal unification in many areas such as economy, social life or culture, which were consequently sent as recommendations for the countries' governments. They then became the basis for international conventions concluded by the governments and passed by parliaments in the form of internal legal regulations. As far as the economy is concerned, the Council focuses on:

- regional policy – by developing near-border co-operation;
- energy policy – The Nordic Council of Electricity Operators, NORDEL, was founded; the Nordic Energy Research is an institution financing energy research between Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Iceland;

- trade and industrial policy – by developing contacts between the member countries' companies. The Nordic Innovation Centre NICE initiates and finances activities which increase the level of innovation in small and medium enterprises in the Scandinavian countries. Its objective is development without national barriers; the Nordic Project Fund-Nonep is a financing institution operating within the framework of the Nordic Council of Ministers, whose aim is to enhance international competitiveness of small and medium enterprises;

- financial and monetary matters – the countries issue joint statements and present them in the fora of the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Nordic financial co-operation was strengthened by establishing the Norex Stock Exchange, a formalised co-operation between the existing stock exchanges. Also the CEOs of stock exchanges in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have expressed a willingness to join the alliance;

- development of transport and communication – within the Council the countries cooperate on improving public transport, discuss issues of traffic congestion and rational development of communication in the near-border and northern areas.

Moreover, the Scandinavian countries have been obliged to cooperate in the area of:

- law – it focuses on removing unnecessary barriers to cross-border freedom of movement of persons and facilitates contacts between the Nordic countries;

- culture – The Nordic Culture Point, which is an office for cultural programmes, provides information and supports cultural institutions applying for financial grants; the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research NORDICOM aims at disseminating knowledge about the media and communication in Scandinavian countries; Nordic House in Reykjavik is a cultural institution whose aim is to enhance cultural contacts between Iceland and other Scandinavian countries; the Nordic Institute NIFIN in Finland whose objective is to promote knowledge about the languages and culture of other Scandinavian countries; the Nordic Institute of Greenland-Napa, which supports, stimulates and contributes to the development of cultural life in Greenland with a special emphasis on children and the youth; the Nordic Institute in Åland, whose task is to facilitate the cultural life of its citizens by contacts with other Scandinavian countries and promoting the culture of the Åland Islands in other parts of Scandinavia;

- education – in 2000 the Nordic Council of Ministers introduced the NORDPLUS programme for young people offering them an opportunity to travel and study. The programme offers three types of grants: NORDPLUS – for students, teachers and scientists working at universities and other institutions of higher education; NORDPLUS junior- for students aged 16–19 and their teachers; NORDPLUS mini – for classes aged 13–16 and their teachers. The programme offers financial support in lifelong education for partners from eight Baltic and Scandinavian countries. Its aim is to create a common Baltic-Nordic educational area;

- science – four institutions are worth mentioning: the Nordic Centre for Spatial Development, Scandinavian Institute of Maritime Law, Nordic Institute for Theoretical Physics, and the Nordic Institute of Folklore. Work in the research sector is coordinated by NordForsk, the institution which supports scientists' mobility and creates opportunities to carry out research in other Scandinavian countries. Also the co-operation in the area of education has been developed. The NORDDUNET database was created and a school network ODIN has been connected with the INTERNET within the Nordic educational system. Many educational programmes, scholarships and social programmes have been introduced;

- health and welfare – The Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues has been established. Its aim is to improve the quality of social policy in the Scandinavian countries, support scientific research, create the network of international co-operation; also the Nordic School of Public Health-NHV has been founded, which is an institution for higher education and research into the public health area. The school offers training for medical personnel concerning healthcare in the Scandinavian and neighbouring regions;

- environmental – currently they are leaders in the area of modern climate solutions and energy technologies.

In 2015 Denmark was made responsible for the international co-operation in the Nordic region. Its slogan reads: "Stronger together". The Danish chairmanship has been focused on four issues whose aim is to strengthen the Nordic partnership, i.e.:

- growth and employment – green and sustainable economic growth, an emphasis on innovation and creativity which have a significant impact on creating new workplaces and development of cities;

- welfare – eliminating inequality in healthcare and the labour market, the fight against social dumping, providing education and training for young people which are essential to obtain a market

position, promoting new workplaces and training centres for young people; exchange of experiences in the area of elderly people's rehabilitation, monitoring long-term consequences of sexual assaults and creating a map of threats in this field, promoting business and innovative digital solutions in order to develop a Nordic system of social care which will allow the countries of the region to remain at the forefront of digital technologies;

- enhance knowledge of Scandinavian values by promoting the “Nordic brand” – sustainable development, innovations, climate and environment, renewable energy, education, democracy, transparency, low level of corruption and gender equality are fundamental Nordic values which the neighbouring countries pay attention to especially in periods of financial crises, and which are perceived as a source of inspiration for their own social challenges. Denmark emphasises the need of promoting the assets of the region, and the knowledge of the fundamental values of individual countries;

- the Arctic – Denmark expects the Nordic countries to play an active role in attempts to guarantee sustainable development of the Arctic based on the needs of the local communities. In the “Blue Arctic” programme, the Danish presidency will focus on the ocean which plays a key role in the Arctic transformation. Climate change means melting icecaps, new navigation routes and an increased volume of shipping, which, in turn, will lead to the development of entrepreneurship and most importantly will require security at sea to be improved. The increase in maritime activity means pressure on the marine environment. Protection of biodiversity has become the most important issue. Denmark expects the Nordic countries to join in documenting the research on the Arctic marine environment's reaction to the increase in transport and fisheries. An extensive knowledge about the biodiversity on the ocean floor is essential to manage the fisheries and conservation appropriately. The experience gained in the Arctic might be transferred to other sea regions. (“Growth, welfare and values”).

Economic growth, public health, a high level of social security and safe environment are interdependent factors of sustainable development which remains at the centre of attention for the countries of the North. The Nordic countries have common views on key social and economic issues. They aim to promote the principles of sustainable development in the local environment and in a global perspective. They are included in the Strategy of

Sustainable Development concluded in August 2003 (“A Good Life in a Sustainable Nordic Region. Nordic Strategy for Sustainable Development”).

The Nordic region is a group of nations with a common heritage. It must be emphasised that there are areas in which they do not possess similar views, priorities and interests. Denmark, Sweden and Finland have common business interests in the Baltic region, whereas Norway and Iceland have always been more West-oriented. Denmark, Sweden and Finland are more focused on their land borders, whereas for Norway the Atlantic Ocean remains a priority for the country. The alliances of the five Nordic countries are different: Norway, Denmark and Iceland belong to NATO, Finland and Sweden want to remain militarily neutral, Sweden, Finland and Denmark are in the European Union, the countries have different currencies with only Finland using the Euro. This fact, however, does not hamper co-operation, but on the contrary, enhances it in every possible area. It is proof of Nordic pragmatism and reconciling seemingly conflicting national interests.

Considering the exceptional proximity of the Nordic countries and their consensus in many areas, developing and extending co-operation seems to be a natural process. Thus, foreign policy and security have become crucial areas of co-operation., which can become an example of “joining and sharing” abilities and possibilities in action. The changes in international policy has led the Scandinavian countries to believe increased regional co-operation is essential. The Nordic region is now less peripheral, thanks to the Arctic which has taken on greater importance due to the natural resources and new navigation routes opened up because of climate change. The region is increasingly used as a corridor between Europe and Asia for sea, air and railway transportation. This, in turn, means that foreign affairs, defence and security have become the most dynamically developing areas of co-operation in Scandinavia. Within the framework of NORDEFECO, the countries have drawn up rules for closer co-operation in the area of defence in every aspect, starting from joint public orders to foreign operations, education and military training.

The Nordic countries have entered a new stage of military co-operation. In April 2015, the defence Ministers of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Denmark announced they intended to extend military co-operation to counter the threat from the

Russian Federation in the Ukrainian crisis. They signed an agreement in which they decided on more joint military exercises, sharing data and experiences in combating cyber attacks, industrial co-operation including arms industry and exchange of intelligence data. The ministers expressed the need to be informed about any unauthorized air traffic, activation of an early warning system, reducing the risk of unpredicted situations and misunderstandings (Nybakk norden.org/en).

According to J. Strang, the author of *Nordic Communities. A vision for the future*, intelligent and flexible co-operation based on solid fundamentals of democracy is the best promotion of the Nordic brand. It is commonly agreed that Nordic co-operation must be enhanced, but there is no clear vision. He quotes Stoltenberg whose idea was to co-operate in the area of foreign-and security policy and Wetterberg who intended to create a federal state (norden.org/en/publications). The author states that only close co-operation can develop a strong Nordic community and outlines key proposals for the future that can tighten the relations:

- prioritise specific policy areas by designating them as Nordic Communities (as per the NORDEFECO model in the area of defence);
- make the foreign and defence policies part of official Nordic co-operation;
- the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers should be realistic in their relationships with the EU (ensuring EU regulations are implemented in a uniform manner);
- use foreign and defence policies as a model for rationalisation in other sectors;
- counter the democratic deficit in international co-operation by involving non-government organisations in international partnerships;
- hold annual debates on Nordic co-operation in the national parliaments;
- separate the formal and substantive work of the Council of Ministers' Secretariat by creating a separate unit – currently it operates as both the administrative secretariat and as a driving force for new ideas;
- make political parties the main driving force of Nordic co-operation;
- reinforce the Nordic brand by defining objectives, standards and indices in various areas of co-operation;
- enhance opportunities for informal contacts between civil servants;

- invest in knowledge about Scandinavia – by developing co-operation between schools and improving the teaching of history, politics, language and geography of the neighbouring countries and running exchange programmes for teachers and students;
- enhance cultural co-operation and increase the Nordic Cultural Fund's budget.

Conclusion

The main pillars of the Nordic model of co-operation are the tradition of constitutional principles, activity of public movements and organisations, freedom of speech, equality, solidarity and respect for the natural environment. In connection with labour and entrepreneurship, these elements are the features of a society which favours efficiency, the sense of security and balance between an individual and a group. The Scandinavian model assumes that the fundamental value is the respect for diversity. There is common acceptance and political will for close co-operation, which have brought many advantages for the Nordic region in comparison to other parts of Europe. Scandinavian countries occupy top positions in international rankings concerning the equal share of income, competitiveness, innovations, employment policy, equality, gender equality and conservation. For many years they have been considered the most stable in the world. It can be seen in the ranking prepared by the *Fund for Peace*, which takes into consideration economic and social indices, the quality of public services, respect for human rights and the rule of law. In 2014, the top four positions were taken by Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway with Iceland in eighth place. The countries' co-operation means not only discussing and implementing the basic Nordic values, but also helps to make them more visible and emphasises the unique character of the Nordic partnership which is beneficial for citizens both in and the outside the region (Nowiak, J. *passim*, Piotrowski *passim*, Bednarczyk et.al 111–32).

Taking into account the above – described characteristics of the Nordic countries and the importance of co-operation, it should be emphasized that the region is not free from imperfections. These include: high taxes and asylum policy. So this is not the end of disagreements in the “Nordic family”. Another thing – Denmark, Iceland and Norway are members of NATO and the Swedes and

Finns remain neutral and outside the alliance. These differences between the Nordic countries translate, in turn, to a different perception regarding the direction of the development of the armed forces. This is why it is difficult to predict the future course of military co-operation between them and the scale.

Nordic co-operation is renowned throughout the world and perceived as the collaboration of a group of countries which are similar in their views and activities. It should be an encouragement for other countries and sub-regional structures to establish closer contacts with the region. The example could be the Balkan countries, which seek a model for their contacts in the Northern Europe. The politicians of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina admit that their geography, political systems, culture and traditions are similar, therefore, the Nordic model, out of other European models of integration, seems to be the most appropriate. The main area of interest is the improvement of co-operation between the parliaments of the countries, signatories of the Dayton Agreement – which ended the Balkan war, and the use of positive Scandinavian experiences in the areas of interest, as well as creating a system of coordination which could secure the continuity of the contacts.

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