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Embassy of Finland
Hanoi



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Hanoi

PRESS RELEASE

Seminar “Continuity and Change in the Nordic Society Model – Adapting to a Digital Age”

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In celebration of the Nordic Day 2019, the four Nordic Embassies in Vietnam (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) team up with the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) in hosting a major seminar on “Continuity and Change in the Nordic Society Model – Adapting to a Digital Age”.

The seminar spotlights the four Nordic Ambassadors to Vietnam and four prominent Nordic experts, including Mr Adam Lebech - Deputy Director General of the Danish Agency for Digitalisation, Ms Anna Sundstrom - Secretary General, Sweden’s Olof Palme International Centre, Dr. Erkki Tuomioja - member of Finnish Parliament and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Dr. Silvija Seres - a mathematician and technology investor from Norway. The Vietnamese keynote speakers are Associate Professor, Doctor Ho Trong Hoai - Director of the Institute of Science Socialism, and Associate Professor, Doctor Bui Van Huyen - Director of the Institute of Economics. The Seminar also attracts participation from 120 Vietnamese researchers, policy-makers, and other stakeholders representing HCMA, key ministries, institutions, business associations and social organisations. Built up from the successful workshop on “The Nordic Socio-Economic Model – Achievements and Lessons Learnt” last year, this Seminar takes a deeper look into the Nordic region’s digital transformation process.

In his opening remarks at the Seminar, Vice President of the Ho Chi Minh Academy of Politics, Associate Professor, Doctor Nguyen Viet Thao affirms *“Being aware of the global trend in the context of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, Vietnam has been promoting digital applications for the country’s development. It is the first priority of the Government of Vietnam to develop e-government and smart cities. Effectively utilising the digital data and knowledge would expose Vietnam to substantial opportunities to get closer to the world’s development level. In response to the urgent needs of the age, we are partnering with the Nordic Embassies in Vietnam to co-host this Seminar as a forum for the exchange of academic knowledge. I believe that this would be a good opportunity for Vietnam to know your multi-dimensional perspectives and apply them in an adaptive and deeper way as Vietnam develops in accordance with our Party and State guidelines and policies”.*

“All Nordic countries are strongly dependant on international free trade and on a functional and operational system. Internally, nations face issues such as aging of the population and the length of working career. Nevertheless, Nordic societies have also good prerequisites for finding sustainable solutions since the existing institutions are constantly recalibrated in order to adapt for the challenges of the current time. Digitalisation is very important part of that”, said Ambassador of Finland, H.E. Mr Kari Kahiluoto in his opening remarks on behalf of the four Nordic countries.

All Nordic countries are in the process of implementing national strategies related to digitalisation. While these policies have similar focus on digital public services, supporting growth and innovation in business and ensuring digital security, each country faces its own difficult questions and has to address them in varying ways.

“Digitalisation brings benefits but also implies challenges. Both public and private sector will experience significant changes when it comes to governance, services, production and distribution, which requires increased efficiency, new thinking, new qualifications, new business models and new policies. As an example the health and social care systems are in the process of being revolutionised due to digitalisation. Rethinking development aid is another area. Digital solutions may contribute to improved efficiency and better outreach to people in need. Digitalisation is a tool for renewal, simplification and improvement. It is also about keeping the ethics right and not forgetting that man and not computers should be in “the driver’s seat”. This is true not only for Norway as a country but also to the Nordic society at large”, said Norway’s Ambassador, H.E. Ms Grete Løchen.

Through their presentations, the four renowned Nordic speakers provided the audience with an overview of how the regional authorities are implementing national and regional digital strategies, and the different types of actors (public sectors, private companies, civil society) that are key in the digital transformation of the region. As the rapid ongoing digital developments change the way we live, the way we run businesses, and the way public and welfare services are delivered, the speakers also shared the challenges and lessons learned from how the whole region changes and adapts to the digitalisation process.

“As is the case with globalisation, with digitalisation follows several dilemmas and challenges. But as the question is not whether the changes will happen, but how, as a society, we must be prepared to adapt and exploit the opportunities brought on by new technologies, using them to produce more prosperity and welfare for our citizens. Despite our fairly modest size and population, the Nordic region is in a good position to embrace the digital future and in recent years we have experienced a huge digital transition that is still ongoing. This is happening thanks to our great trust and confidence in each other and in the public sector, as well as due to the good digital competences of Nordic people and businesses. And we are very enthusiastic to share our lessons learned throughout the process with Vietnam,” said Ambassador of Denmark, H.E. Mr Kim Højlund Christensen.

“We pay a lot of attention to human capital development and the Nordic region has one of the most highly educated populations in the world. In our open and connected societies, we believe that individuals should be given opportunities to develop, take responsibility and dare to challenge prevailing norms and structures. Human rights apply online as they do offline. We want to create fertile ground for people to be free-thinking, tech-savvy, dynamic citizens who contribute to creativity, innovation and progress,” noted Ambassador of Sweden, H.E. Mr Pereric Högberg.

In his closing remarks, Ambassador Högberg also emphasized that *“Separately, the Nordic countries are small, but together we make up the 11th largest economy in the world. The Nordic Region is innovative, particularly in welfare, education, entrepreneurship, sustainability and research. This has set strong foundations for us to develop smart societies. We will continue to work closely with other countries including Vietnam to find smart solutions to address challenges and opportunities during our digital age”*.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Nordic countries consist of Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland as well as The Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. Since the Helsinki Agreement, in which the Nordic cooperation “constitution” was signed in 1962, it has touched the lives of very many people in the Nordic countries by creating the oldest and most diverse forms of regional political collaboration for the past six decades. It is not by chance that a region with only 27 million people, which would not even make it into the top 50 of countries ranked by population, is one of the most integrated regions with shared values and common development goals.

As a result, the Nordic countries generally score highly on international rankings and indexes, such as *Innovation, Happiness, Human Development, Citizens’ Welfare, Governance, Transparency, Equality, Social Progress Index, Inclusive Development Index, Sustainability Index* and more. The ranking exemplifies the success of the Nordic model where digitalisation is seen as a tool for sustainable Nordic regional development. The region is widely acknowledged as digital frontrunners in a European and even a global context. The UN E-Government Development Index (EGDI) 2018 ranked Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden among the countries with very high EGDI.

All four Nordic countries were among the first European countries that established diplomatic ties with Vietnam (Sweden: 1969, Denmark and Norway: 1971, Finland: 1973). Over the years, the Nordic countries have remained Vietnam’s trusted and good friends even during hard times. We now continue going alongside with Vietnam in its effort to strengthen governance, economic growth and promote equality, democracy, respect for human rights, environmental protection, and inclusiveness as the foundations for the prosperity and sustainable development.

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For video and pictures:

This is our vision – our Nordic perspective: <https://youtu.be/aeme-ka5mEA>

The link below gives journalists access to free photos of Nordic environments, policies and events. The vast majority of the images may be freely used as long as the source is cited, but please check the individual file for information on rights. <http://www.norden.org/en/news-and-events/images>

About the keynote speakers:

Mr ADAM LEBECH is Deputy Director General in the Agency for Digitisation, which is responsible for Danish e-government policy and key government IT systems including NemID, Digital Post and Borger.dk. He has previously worked as the managing director of the Danish ICT and Electronics Federation and held senior management positions at various ministries and agencies, working in the fields of e-government, IT, and Telecoms policy since 2001. He holds a master's degree in political science from Aarhus University.

Doctor ERKKI TUOMIOJA is a member of the Finnish Parliament, former Minister for Foreign Affairs, and former Minister of Trade and Industry. He also served as the Chairman of the Grand Committee (EU affairs) for two terms. He was the Vice-Chairman of the SDP Parliamentary Group for five years before becoming the group's Chairman in 1996. He was a member of the Nordic Council 1971-1979, 1991-1996, 2007-2011 and became the President of the Nordic Council in 2008.

Erkki Tuomioja worked as a journalist before being elected to parliament. He was Deputy Mayor in Helsinki 1979-91. He has a Ph.D. in political science, B.Sc. in economics and holds a lectureship in political history in the University of Helsinki. He is also author of 20 books on history, contemporary affairs and politics, including *A Delicate Shade of Pink. The Lives of Hella Wuolijoki and Salme Dutt in the Service of Revolution* (written and published in English, translated into Finnish, Estonian, Swedish, German and Russian). He also held numerous posts in social organisations, including membership of the Finnish Olympic Committee 1980-1992

Doctor SILVIJA SERES is an academic techie with a past in corporate leadership, a present in entrepreneurial investment, and a future in large-scale digital transformation processes in public and private sector. She has worked on algorithm research in Oxford, development for the search engine Alta Vista in Palo Alto, strategic leadership in Fast Search and Transfer in Oslo and Boston, and later in Microsoft. She now works as a board member in several major companies such as the Oslo Stock Exchange and DNV-GL, and as an active investor in several startup companies.

More information: <https://silvijaseres.com/about-silvija/cv/>

ANNA SUNDSTRÖM is the Secretary General of the Olof Palme International Centre. Anna Sundström was most recently from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Ministerial Office. Also, she previously worked as political advisor the Committee on Defence, Office of the Social Democratic Party in Swedish Parliament and as head of operations at the Olof Palme International Centre and international secretary of the Social Democratic Women's Organisation of Sweden.

Anna Sundström holds a Master of Arts in Theology from Uppsala University and a Bachelor of Political Science from Stockholm University.