

***Contact Group between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Government of Åland
Action plan 2013***

Background

The Contact Group between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Government of Åland was established in 1998 by decision of the then Foreign Minister Tarja Halonen. The Group is appointed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Government of Åland, and its members have a mandate for an indefinite period. The Contact Group was established for developing and increasing the use of the Åland Example in international contexts, and for increasing awareness about the province and contacts with it also otherwise. This purpose can be achieved for instance by increasing and strengthening contacts between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Finnish representatives abroad and in international bodies, on one hand, and the Government of Åland, on the other hand.

Meetings and issues

The Contact Group held its first meeting in December 1998 and has since then had between two and five meetings annually. During the period from 1998 to 2012, the Group e.g. arranged seminars and exhibitions related to Åland and dealing with different themes, initiated an analysis of the use of the Åland Example, and acquainted itself with the activities of the Crisis Management Initiative in Helsinki, the Crisis Management Centre in Kuopio and the Unit for Policy Planning and Research at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Moreover, the Group discussed visits of foreign journalists, researchers and politicians to Åland, the international status of the province, international minority and autonomy issues, security policy and information issues as well as different forms of co-operation between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, other ministries and Åland.

General objectives

The general objectives of the Contact Group include the following:

- to monitor security policy developments and, in that context, to identify those problem areas and hot spots in different parts of the world where the Åland Example could be relevant
- to follow up different initiatives where Åland is used as an example of autonomy and conflict management
- to follow the interpretation of those international treaties which regulate the position of Åland as a self-governing, demilitarised and neutralised territory, and to oversee the sustainability of the treaties in developments of international security and defence co-operation
- to promote co-operation between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior and Åland in civil crisis management and conflict management
- to develop the use of Åland's resources in civil crisis management and conflict management, e.g. by promoting peace negotiations, peace talks, international study visits and research on the Åland Example

- to market Åland actively as a model for crisis management and minority solutions
- to co-operate in arranging seminars dealing with Åland outside the province
- to support and, if necessary, to initiate production and distribution of information material about Åland
- to assist during visits of foreign journalists, politicians and public officials to Åland
- to ensure information about Åland to the Training Course on International Affairs (KAVAKU) and visits to Åland at regular intervals during the training
- to ensure regular information about Åland to Finnish ambassadors and press and cultural attachés while they are in Finland, and to ensure that an information officer from Åland is invited to information meetings.

Activities in 2013

For the year 2013 the Contact Group plans the following activities:

- **Analysis of the use of the Åland Example**
The analysis of the use of the Åland Example having been completed in 2011, the Contact Group discusses the possibilities of using the analysis in practical work and producing information and educational material in different languages.
- **Information package about the Åland Example for ambassadors and Finnish staff of international bodies**
The Ministry for Foreign Affairs continuously makes information updates at its website and Intranet and, when necessary, at the other websites administered by it.
- **Civil crisis management**
The Contact Group studies the possibility of increased opportunities for actors from Åland to engage in civil crisis management. A potential target group in Åland will be identified.
- **Potential meeting with EU officials and politicians concerning the use of the Åland Example**
The Contact Group will study the possibility of organising a meeting with EU officials and politicians in Brussels in 2013 to discuss the use of the Åland Example within the CFSP.

Secretarial functions of the Contact Group

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs provides secretarial functions for the Contact Group, jointly with Åland Information Office in Helsinki. The Åland Information Office maintains and updates a list of visits and contacts relating to the Åland Example, and the library of the Åland Parliament keeps a list of related literature.