

Statement of the Ministers of Economy, Industry and Trade of the States of the Council of the Barents Euro Arctic region

The Ministers of Economy, Industry and Trade of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, The Russian Federation and Sweden and the representative of the European Commission met in Murmansk on the 31st of May 1996 to discuss interaction among the countries of the Council of the Barents Euro-Arctic region (BEAR) in the economic sphere and to encourage the multilateral economic cooperation in the interest of the development in this region.

1. The Participants noted with satisfaction that the Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation is becoming an important instrument for social and economic progress in the North of the European continent and that it contributes to stability and security in this region and in Europe as a whole.

2. The Participants noted also the positive development of economic cooperation in the region and that a good foundation has been established for future developments.

3. The Participants expressed their willingness to improve conditions for economic cooperation i. a. through encouraging contacts between people, organisations and business enterprises in the Barents Euro-Arctic region as well as trade and investment promotion and the development of cooperation at the level of the local authorities, e.g. by creating legal financial and organisational conditions.

4. Relations with the EU - (to be formulated later)

5. In this context the Russian side will undertake the following:

- seek to remove obstacles to the development of trade and economic ties among the countries of the region;

- improve taxation systems and customs regulations to encourage cross-border investment cooperation;

- develop and elaborate the mechanisms of guarantees for and protection of investments;

- develop banking, insurance, consulting and engineering services;

6. The Participants appreciate the activities of the BEAR Working group on economic cooperation in selecting and scrutinising the priority projects and support its efforts in the field of financing, including contacts with International Financial Organisations. At the meeting of the Barents Euro Arctic Council on October 9-10, 1995, in Rovaniemi, Finland, the Council endorsed the recommendations of the Working Group.

7. The Participants note the importance of the interaction on national bodies in the interests of steady social and economic progress in the BEAR region and acceleration of regional cooperation in the area.

8. The Participants also noted that the EBRD Venture Capital Fund has begun its operations in the North-West of Russia.

9. In accordance with the legislation of their countries the Participants will facilitate the elaboration of programmes coordinated with the BEAR programme.

10. The Participants noted with satisfaction the increasing interest of international and national financial institutions for the BEAR projects. They support the efforts aimed at involving EBRD, IBRD and NIB in the BEAR projects. The preparation of the framework agreement between the Ministry of Finance of Russia and the Nordic Investment Bank was noted with interest.

11. The Participants recognized the importance of the participation of business circles in the economic development of BEAR.

12. The Participants express their satisfaction with the results of this meeting and acknowledge the importance of new meetings, as may be necessary. Meetings of Ministers of different sectors of economy should become an important link in coordinating positions and resolving problems of the cooperation among the BEAR member countries.