



Regional Council of
NORTH KARELIA

STATEMENT OF THE BARENTS REGIONAL COUNCIL

on the occasion of the conclusion of Finland's Presidency of the BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC COUNCIL

24 October 2023, Joensuu, Finland

The Barents Regional Council (its Nordic regions) convened on 24 October 2023 in Joensuu, Finland under the pre-presidency of North Karelia.

The Barents Regional Council:

Reaffirms its commitments to the priorities and goals included in the Protocol Agreement from the Statutory Meeting of the Regional Council of the Barents Region (Kirkenes 1993), the Joint Statement of the Barents Regional Council (Kirkenes 2013), and the Barents Program 2019–2023,

Acknowledges the Joint Statement of Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the European Union, made on the 9th of March 2022 regarding Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation, which **condemns** in the strongest possible terms Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and **suspends** activities involving Russia in the Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation,

Acknowledges the decision of the Russian Federation to withdraw from the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) on 18 September 2023,

Underlines that the close relations between the regional and the national levels are what makes the Barents cooperation unique. When representatives from national, regional, and local levels together with the indigenous peoples and the youth are working together, it creates an exceptional environment and spirit.

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Reaffirms its commitment to continue cooperation in the Barents Regional Council and its subsidiary bodies.

Recognizes the need to assess and further develop Barents cooperation and its structures, strengthen dialogue and cooperation with other northern cooperation forums, and deepen cooperation between the highest regional and political leaders of the Barents Regional Council member regions.

Expresses its gratitude to North Karelia for leading the work of the Barents Regional Council in the format "Friends of the Future President" from March 2022 to October 2023, and to Finland and the International Barents Secretariat (IBS) for excellent cooperation during Finland's Presidency in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 2021–2023.

Welcomes the incoming interim Trio Presidency of Finland, Norway and Sweden in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council for a one-year period, unless otherwise decided, and encourages them to forward the Barents cooperation.

Welcomes North Karelia as the incoming chair of the Barents Regional Council in 2023–2025, unless otherwise decided, and **expresses** its full support to North Karelia's presidency.

Recognizes the relevancy and importance of the thematic priorities of the incoming North Karelia Presidency:

- **In green transition**, it is important to support the joint implementation of the recommendations of the green transition study on industrial investments in the North, presented by Finland's BEAC Presidency in February 2023, while taking seriously into consideration the opinions and living conditions of the local people, particularly of Sámi people, and the unique and vulnerable nature of the northern regions.
- **In transport and logistics**, the rapidly developing North needs smooth and sustainable transport and logistics connections for transporting goods and raw materials and for people's safe and smooth movement during work and leisure time by rail, road, and air.
- **In people-to-people cooperation**, it is vital to deepen the cultural exchange between the Barents regions, enlarge networking and mobility of cultural actors, increase Barents youth sports exchange, and improve youth's physical and mental health.
- **In economic cooperation**, the objective is that economic and business cooperation has deepened and established as part of Barents cooperation and the knowledge of the strong economic sectors and export and import markets in the Barents regions has improved.

and in the cross-cutting themes:

- **Youth:** Comprising young people and including their viewpoints in all regional cooperation is vital for the development and sustainability of the Barents region. It is especially essential to support their networking, capacity building and opportunities to influence issues that are important to them.
- **Sámi people:** The involvement of the indigenous Sámi people in planning and implementing activities of North Karelia's presidency programme is vital and ensured. The Sámi people of Finland, Sweden and Norway, the living Sámi culture, the Sámi languages, and the Sámi way of life give the Barents region a special characteristic that differs from other regions.
- **Climate & nature:** Unique and vulnerable nature, climate change and loss of biodiversity are considered in all fields of Barents regional cooperation. Without a healthy, diverse nature and effective measures to mitigate climate change and adapt to it, we will not have a safe and comfortable residential and living environment or sustainable economic activity.