



## **Meeting of the Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation, 27 May 2024, chaired by Sweden**

### **1. Welcome from Sweden**

Henrik Larsson, Head of Section at the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) welcomed the meeting participants.

### **2. Opening of the meeting**

Chair Henrik Larsson, MSB Sweden, opened the meeting. The participants presented themselves (the list of participants is attached).

### **3. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted with a proposal from NO to include a presentation of Arctic Reihn exercise.

### **4. Information from CSO meetings (1 March and 18-19 April) – comments by all countries and discussion on future cooperation in the region**

**Marja Joenusva**, Chair of CSO Trio-Presidency from the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) informed about two CSO-meetings organised during the spring 2024: in Umeå and Tromsø. Working groups under BEAC participated in meetings with a short report. She stressed that there is a crucial moment in the Barents cooperation – countries are redefining the future of the cooperation. The plan is by October 2024 take a decision on future format of cooperation in the region. According the understanding of Ms. Joenusva, there seems to be three different approaches to the future cooperation:

- **NO** would like to retain the same format for cooperation
- **SE** – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will decrease the level of the involvement; responsibilities gradually will be transferred to the regional level.

- **FI** – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will withdraw from Barents cooperation as of 1.1.2025.

Countries need to agree on the future format for cooperation together. FI explained their strong position – as Russia left BEAC there is no need for the Foreign Ministry to coordinate the cooperation. Cooperation can be integrated into Nordic format. Another argument is that the Finnish economy has a challenging time and resources need to be prioritised.

**SE** – informed about the governors meeting the 24 Maj. Magnus H Hansson presented the outcome of the meeting (PP attached).

**FI** – the Ministry of Interior (MoI) follows the MoFA direction. There is a need to change a cooperation. Can Nordred be a future format where IS och DK is also involved? This issue needs to be analysed and discussed. Marja Joenusva stressed a need to continue exercise cooperation in the region.

**NO** – agree that framework for cooperation need to be changed and Nordred could serve as a platform. DSB informed that DK has interest in training och exercise in could conditions, this can be a way to go. NO informed about the meeting with MoFA where a cooperation on public security together with youth and indigenous people cooperation were highlighted. SE wondered if there is a possibility to widen a scope of cooperation and include civil defence aspects (refugees etc). SE has funding for civil defence exercises. Both FI and NO supported this proposal.

## **5. Exercise in Finland 2025**

**Mikko Jääskeläinen** MoI presented the Finnish standpoints on the next exercise. It's important to run the exercises but the exercise demands a large planning process, funding and resources are challenging. NO wonder if there is a possibility to switch from traditional field to smaller table-top exercises on strategic level and field segment for rescue workers. NO has preparation materials for Barents Rescue exercise planned in 2022 that can be shared with FI. Possible exercise scenarios could be climate change and forest fire and its consequences. Those topics are relevant for all three countries. SE interest to focus on aerial and land resources coordination. Evacuation – one of issue (baseline NATO). Communication test – cross-border component. NO stressed the importance of a planning work. SE strongly requested a signal as soon as possible on the year for the next exercise. FI commented that 2026 is more realistic but at the moment FI has no decision. 2026 will open possibility to apply for EU funding.

## 6. Brief information from all countries and from the International Barents Secretariat on recent or planned activities, etc.

**Finland** informed about ongoing work on update of a national HNS manual. Ongoing discussion on NATO cooperation which is still new. MoI is reorganising the rescue department. Ongoing investigating on needs to change a legislation regarding the shelters.

**Norway** is much involved in support to Ukraine. This affects a ministerial work – working on a white paper to the Parliament on total defence system and its status. Top issues are civil-military cooperation, HNS (cooperation with FI and SE). DSB focus on MEDEVAC and donations to Ukraine, total defence and NATO cooperation.

**Sweden** – affected by situation in Ukraine, learning a lot from the war. NATO issues are on an agenda. Informed about a process of reactivating of civil conscription which aims to double rescue services in case of war. Ongoing work on update of evacuation plan: SE has plans in areas around nuclear power stations but not in case of war. Ongoing work at the national level on updating brochure, planned to publish in October.

Regional level (Norrbotten and Västerbotten) is working with civil preparedness issues. There are ongoing activities in both the direction north/south and east/west in the countries and also cross-border with Norway and Finland. With the new structure for civil defense, Norrbotten and Västerbotten are included in the northern civil defense area (with Jämtland/Västernorrland) which is 53% of Sweden's area.

**International Barents Secretariat** – three persons employed at the Secretariat at the moment (before 6-7 persons). Future for Secretariat is unclear. Youth and indigenous people working groups are active. Secretariat has challenges to provide a same support to working groups as before. NO covers 72% of Secretariats budget, Sweden app. 14% and Finland app. 14%. For NO is important to continue cooperation but together with FI and SE.

**Anders Gundersen DSB, NO** made a presentation of Arctic Reihn exercise. EU funded exercise with focus on Arctic Radiation in High North.

## **7. Summary and next meeting of the Joint Committee**

Countries agreed on importance to continue a cooperation in the Barents region but format and framework of future cooperation needs to be analysed and discussed.

Finland will inform other countries about decision for the next exercise as soon as possible.

Next meeting will be organised **the 7 November** in Luleå or Umeå.