



Meeting of the Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation, 7 November 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.

4. Discussion on future cooperation in the region

NO – difficult topic. Signals from the Norwegian MFA is to continue Barents cooperation in 2025, there are ongoing discussions at the political level about the future. Probably it's natural to continue cooperation connected to the exercise in 2025. It's difficult at the moment to declare the Norwegian position.

SE – at the national level Sweden looks positive at the cooperation which is important for the region. SE is positive to the Finnish exercise initiative in 2025. Representatives from Norrbotten and Västerbotten agreed to that.

International Barents Secretariat (IBS) – Council of the Senior Officials (CSO) approved the Secretariats budget which is positive. CSO encourage the working groups to continue cooperation. FI will leave cooperation but political decision has not taken yet. Even at the regional level region of North Karelia decided to leave cooperation. It can happen that other Finnish regions will follow North Karelia. Norway is willing to find a solution with BEAC chairmanship and working on that.

FI – the Ministry of Interior (MoI) follows the MFA direction.

5. Exercise in Finland 2025

Mikko Jääskeläinen MoI presented proposals for the Rescue Borealis 2025 exercise (“in the spirit of the Barents Rescue exercise tradition”) - Nordic Rescue and rescEU CBRN/MED exercise. Exercise is planned for autumn 2025, the planning time is critical. The Initial Planning Conference (IPC) will be organised the 26 November in Helsinki. Finland is working on scenarios and welcomes input from Norway and Sweden.

NO – Ministry of Justice and Public Security welcomes positive news from Finland. The official decision on participation has not been taken yet, there are discussion on funding and expectations from Finland on NO participation. The proposed topic is highly relevant and exercise is a good cooperation format. DSB is the point of contact. **DSB** confirmed participation at IPC with three participants. There is a huge interest from the region to participate in the exercise.

SE – MSB thanked for the invitation, very positive to participation in the exercise. The official answer to the invitation will be send to FI soon. The proposed topic is very relevant, there is a need to exercise CBRNE. There are ongoing discussions on funding. Contact person at MSB is Henrik Gustafsson. **Norrbottnen** would like to have a short briefing for rescue services in the county during the meeting under week 46. Wonder regarding NGOs participation in the exercise. FI answered that they are open for all proposals. **Västerbotten** pointed out the time issue as a critical. What expectation Finland has on other countries participation? Is it a civil exercise or there are expectations of participation from a military side? FI confirmed again openness to all proposals and noted that no nuclear weapons will be a part of scenario. If military participates, the role will be support in logistic or/and transportation. Mikko will check if the invitation has been sent to SE and NO military.

IBS offered information support for the exercise at BEAC website, if needed.

DSB wonder if the invitation has been shared with other Norwegian authorities. DSB is willing to share the exercise scenarios that have been developed for the Barents exercise.

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 as well as a manual on radiation situation (has been updated last time in 2016). FI sign a defence cooperation agreement with the US a year ago and is developing a manual.

Norway - Ministry of Justice and Public Security will present a white paper on total defence system to the Parliament. After submission the document can be shared with FI and SE. Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in Bodö is investigating the issue with the sea borders between neighbouring countries.

Sweden informed that MSB has a new Director General Mikael Frisell who started his appointment the 1 November 2024. He has a long-standing career in the Swedish Armed Forces and among others have been Commanding Officer for the Norrbotten Regiment and for Regional Command North.

MSB also updated on a process of reactivating of civil conscription which aims to double rescue services in case of war. Mentioned the governmental proposition to the Parliament on total defence and ongoing work on update of HNS manual.

Regional level - **Norrbotten** informed about a coming regional meeting the 14 November. The meeting is an excellent possibility to inform about Rescue Borealis 2025 the regional city offices in Nordland, Troms-Finnmark, Finska Lapland and Österbotten. FI and NO will inform colleagues from the region about the exercise before the 14 November. Participation from the military side in the exercise needs to be discussed, observers' participation? **Västerbotten** informed about international course with participation from FI and No that has been organised during week 44. The course was successful, 50-60 participants from the northern parts of FI, No and SE.

7. Summary and next meeting of the Joint Committee

Countries agreed on importance to continue a cooperation in the region but difficult to agree on format at the moment, there is a need to wait for the political decision. Under 2025 countries will cooperate on the Finnish exercise.

Finland will chair the Joint Committee under 2025 and will be back with the date for the next meeting. One of proposals is to organise the meeting back-to-back to the Main Planning Conference for the exercise in March 2025.