



## **International Barents Secretariat**

Tomas Hallberg  
Head of Secretariat

Annual Report  
2016

[www.barentscooperation.org](http://www.barentscooperation.org)

## **ANNUAL REPORT - 2016**

### **The Barents Cooperation in 2016**

2016 was the first year of the Russian chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Kainuu chairmanship of the Barents Regional Council (BRC). In October 2015, the national chairmanship was handed over from Finland and the regional from Arkhangelsk region during the ministerial meeting in Oulu.

**The BEAC Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)** met four times in 2016. The meetings were held in Arkhangelsk March 21-23, in Petrozavodsk June 14-16, in Syktyvkar October 4-6 and in Naryan-Mar December 13-15. The most important administrative decisions taken by the CSO were to launch a communication project, aiming to improve the communication among the working groups. The project started in January 2016 and reported in the middle of June. Almost all working groups, represented by their Chairmen were invited to one of the CSO meetings to present the activities of their respective working group. The Chair of the WGIP is a regular member of the CSO.

**The Barents Regional Council** held two meetings chaired by the County of Kainuu, May 29 – June 1 in Kajaani and November 7-8 in Luleå. The Barents Regional Committee (RC) met back-to-back with the BRC. The Regional Committee also held two video conference meetings, on February 12 and September 22.

The main focus of the BRC and RC was the development of transport connections and tourism. A high-level event was organized in Kajaani back-to-back with the RC and BRC meetings in May where Minister of Transport and Communications of Finland Anne Berner attended.

Regional youth issues have also been high up on the agenda. The Luleå meeting decided on the financing for the Barents Regional Youth Council for 2017-2018. Each Barents region from Finland, Sweden and Norway will contribute 5000 eur / year. The membership application of North Karelia to the BRC was also accepted in Luleå. Thus, the Barents region consists now of altogether 14 regions. The Regional committee chairmanship produced a new communications strategy.

### **The Barents working groups**

Most of the Barents working groups have been very active during the review period. Altogether 25 working group meetings were held.

The following Working groups did not have any working groups meeting during 2016:  
(Chairmanship in brackets)

- Joint Working Group on Energy (N)
- Joint Working Group on Tourism (RUS)
- Joint Working Group on Youth (RUS)
- Working Group on Economic Cooperation (RUS)

**The Joint Working Group on Health and related Social Issues (JWGHS)** had two meetings in 2016, in Rovaniemi on April 14-15 and on Solovki Island October 6-7. The cooperation on health and social issues is today an important part of the Barents Cooperation.

Representatives from the national and regional health authorities in the Barents countries meet twice a year to discuss relevant issues. Finland held the chairmanship of the JWGHS together with Arkhangelsk during 2016. The Working Group is open to representatives of indigenous peoples and representatives of the WHO, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS), the European Commission, and other bodies upon invitation.

Three specialized sub-programs have been developed by specialists under the Barents Health Programme. The Barents Tuberculosis Program, The Barents Children and Youth at Risk Programme and the Barents HIV/AIDS Programme have been very effective, largely due to the good contact that has been established between professional networks in the region during the last 20 years.

**The Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC)** held no working group meetings during 2016. The group was chaired by Russia.

**The Barents Forest Network** had one meeting 2016. The meeting of the Working group took place on June 2 in Saint-Petersburg forestry research institute. It was attended by management and representatives of the Federal Forestry Agency, representatives of the Northern forestry research Institute, the Saint-Petersburg forestry research Institute, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, the Natural Resources Institute of Finland, the International Secretariat of BEAC, the Ministry of agriculture and forestry of Finland, the Ministry of agriculture and food of Norway and the Swedish Forest Agency.

**The Barents Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics (BRWGTL)** had 3 meetings 2016. The first meeting of the year was held March 1 in Tromsø. Part of the group obtained experiences of travelling by air from Oulu and Luleå by Arctic Airlink. The second meeting of the WG was held in Ylläs April 25-26 back-to-back with the workshop on Transport Strategy for Northern Finland. The third meeting was held Kajaani May 31 together with the meetings of WG on Tourism and Culture. A delegation of the BRWGTL participated in the BEATA and Transport Minister meeting in Arkhangelsk June 20-21 where the further updating the JBTP and a joint declaration and Barents Transport Strategy were discussed. A workshop on preparing a CBC project application was held in Helsinki September 27-28.

In the beginning of the year, the Working Group prepared an annual action plan and updated the mandate of the WG.

**The Joint Working Group on Education and Research (JWGER)** held two meeting in Arkhangelsk on April 7 and Saint Petersburg September 12. Through its activities the WG emphasized the priorities of the RF Chairmanship at the Barents Council including such areas of cooperation as transport, environment, culture, research and education. Creation of a common educational space in the Barents region and further development of internationalization in the area of higher education and research has been recognized by the WG members as a priority task. The chairmanship for the group represented and participated in more than 15 events during 2016.

**The Barents Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation** held two meetings during 2016, in Luleå April 19 and in Saint Petersburg December 8. During the Swedish Chairmanship in the Barents Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation (JC) the work of the JC has been systematized and structured in order to better fulfill the purpose of the agreement. The JC has decided that the exercises will be carried out every three years starting from 2019 instead of every two years. In general the cooperation is constructive and pragmatic with active participation from all Barents countries.

**The Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP)**, held one meetings in Stockholm (April 7). Because of the lack of an IP coordinator at the Norwegian Barents Secretariat the activities have been lower this year: Most of the resources have been devoted to plan the big IP summit in Moscow April 2017.

**The Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY)** organized no meetings during 2016. The problem with financing of the BYCO office in Murmansk was mentioned in last year's annual report. In September 2016 the office was closed because of lack of finances. Russia has still not fulfilled its promises. Finland and Norway followed the Swedish position that they will not pay until Russia has. The regional council in the Luleå meeting decided that all Nordic regions will pay 5000 euro each per year to support BRYC. Even if JWGY did not have any meetings there have been many youth activities in the Barents Cooperation. One example was the 10<sup>th</sup> Barents Reunion in Haparanda/Tornio May 25-26 and another annual regional youth meeting held in the village of Yb, in Komi Republic in Russia, December 14-18.

**The Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC)** held three meetings: in Kajaani (May 30-31) Moscow (October 13) and (November 8). Moreover, the Russian Chairmanship invited to a Ministerial meeting held in Moscow November 9. The working group continued to work with the mandate for 2014-2018 and the Strategy on Cultural Cooperation for the same period. A decision was made concerning the guidelines for Barents Culture Cooperation Scholarship/ Barents Culture Award. The scholarship will be 10 000 Euro – equal for each country. The sum should cover the expenses for the recipient to take part in the common event. Art forms awarded with the scholarship should include a diversity of categories. The recipients of the scholarship should be individuals, artist groups or NGOs, but not institutions. Moreover, the focus on cooperation in the Barents region is desirable, but there is no strict requirement that the candidate should reside in the region.

**Regional Working group on Investment and Economic Cooperation** met twice during 2016, April 7 in Stockholm and December 16 in Murmansk. The second meeting was only attended by delegates from Norway and Russia. One big challenge is that the member countries are represented with a variety of public and private institutions with different mandates for the participation and progress of the working group. A fundamental discussion within the partners of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council on how to structure the work and reposition this working group is recommended.

**The working group on Energy has not had any meetings since 2012.**

**The Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT) held no meetings in 2016.**

**Barents- Euro- Arctic-Pan European Transport Area (BEATA)** met once during 2016 in Arkhangelsk June 20 back-to-back with the Transport Ministerial meeting. They also had two expert video conference meetings, on May 12 and June 14. The Russian chairmanship also organized three international conferences about transport issues in the north and Barents Region, April 12 in Murmansk, November 1 in Saint Petersburg and November 8 also in Saint Petersburg. The priorities have been to draft Joint Barents Transport Plan, improvement of transport safety, implementation of global satellite navigation, systems, strengthening of interaction between the BEAC working bodies responsible for transport and tourism and professional training for the transport industry in the Arctic region, including shipping.

**BEAC Working Group on Environment (WGE):** 2016 was the first year of the Norwegian chairmanship after the chairmanship was transferred from Russia to Norway in Sortavala, Russia November 24-25 2015. Two meetings of the WGE was held in 2016 – the first in Svanhovd, Norway, March 13-15 and the second in St. Petersburg September 21-23. There were 35-40 participants in both meetings.

The main areas of cooperation within the WGE is the Barents environmental "Hot Spots", nature protection, water issues, climate change and sustainability. For the first three issues, there are separate active subgroups while climate change and sustainability is handled by the WGE directly. The fourth subgroup of WGE, the Subgroup on Cleaner production and environmentally sound consumption, is temporarily put on hold due to lack of resources.

The subgroups have met back-to-back with the WGE-meetings and have held own meetings, both physically and by Skype/telephone. In addition there have been several project meetings of the projects carried out under the WGE and its subgroups. The WGE seeks close cooperation with the **Regional Working Group on Environment (RWGE)**. RWGE is always invited to hold their meetings in connection with the WGE-meetings. This year they hold all their meeting at the same time and place as WGE.

### **Action Plan on Climate Change**

*Updating the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation*, adopted at the Barents environmental ministerial meeting in Inari, Finland, in 2013, is one of the goals of the Norwegian chairmanship for 2016-2017. The International Barents Secretariat has been tasked to gather proposals for new projects from the relevant working groups in the Barents cooperation. Five working groups have come with their proposals (WGE, JWGER, BJCRC, BFSN and BRYC). Contribution from other WGs is awaited. The Second Edition of the Action Plan will be presented to CSO at the meeting in June.

In addition, IBS has been involved in the implementation of the NCM Arctic Programme's Project on climate change aiming at development of the CC regional strategies in the Russian Barents and exchange of experience on climate change mitigation and adaptation. The next event within the project is held in Arkhangelsk on March 15-16. The next event is a study-visit to Lulea, Norrbotten. More info: <http://www.barentscooperation.org/en/About/Barents-region/Climate-Change/Project>

IBS is also participating in a new NPA project on development of climate change regional strategies in cooperation with partners from Sweden (Sundsvall), Finland (Lapland), Northern Ireland, Norway (Finnmark) and other partners. Preliminary it has been approved by the Organizing Committee, more information about the project will appear soon.

### **Synergy of the four Regional Sister Councils**

Synergy with the so-called Regional Sister Councils (AC, BEAC, CBSS and NCM ) has been called for by the BEAC. Therefore it has become customary to organize once a year a working level meeting aimed at improving cross-cutting coordination and reducing overlap. The annual synergy meeting of the Regional Sister Councils was held in Stockholm on November 28. At this year's meeting, the Arctic Council Secretariat proposed to have a common internship Programme for the four councils, allowing the intern to participate in the work of each organization for some months during one year and then report the outcome at the yearly meeting. The same proposal was put forward by IBS last year. The idea was endorsed and the heads of the respected secretariats were asked to prepare a concept paper on the hoped outcomes of the possible internship.

### **Communication activities**

The communication and public information activities of the IBS have been carried out according to the contract between the IBS and the Arctic Centre at the University of Lapland. A major update of the website content and layout was done in 2016. The name was changed from [www.BEAC.st](http://www.BEAC.st) to [www.barentscooperation.org](http://www.barentscooperation.org). The site functioned well during the year and the amount of visitors was doubled during the autumn, very much thanks to more activities on social media as Twitter and Facebook. The Arctic Centre has edited and provided content for two editions of the Barents Saga newsletter. Social media has also been used to support the sharing of information and discussion about the Barents region. Arctic Centre's communication staff and the IBS personnel have met several times during the year, both in Kirkenes and in Rovaniemi. The Swedish Barents Press association also visited the IBS together with editors-in-chief and journalists during a study visit in Barents region. A survey among our working groups was launched to gather feedback from the working group, who reported a need for improving communication, participation and cooperation among the working groups. Building on these findings, a communication project was initiated together with four project partners. The project was financially supported by the Norwegian Barents Secretariat and started in December 2015 and was reported in June 2016.

### **Attendance of the Head of the IBS at various conferences and meetings**

- Arctic Frontiers, Tromsø 24-27/1
- Kirkenes Conference, Kirkenes 4-5/2
- Europa Forum Norra Sverige, Piteå 25-26/2
- WGE, Svanhøvd Norway 16-17/3
- RWGIEC. Stockholm 8/4
- JWGHS, Rovaniemi 14-15/4
- Barents Conference, Moscow 19/4
- WGIP, Stockholm 2/5 2016
- Barents Reunion, Haparanda 24-25/5
- Ministers of Transport, Arkhangelsk 20-21/6

- MFA Sweden Barents meeting, Stockholm 16/9
- Northern Periphery Arctic Programme, Akureyri 28/9 2016
- International day Vadsö 26/10
- Transport Conference, Sankt Petersburg 31/10-1/11
- Ministers of Culture, Moscow 8-9/11
- Murmansk Business Week 14-15/11
- WGIE meeting, Murmansk 16/11
- Sister Council meeting, Stockholm 28/11
- Barents Conference, Voxenåsen Oslo 2/12

+ All CSO and RC meetings (except one in Luleå)

#### **Attendance of the Executive Officer of the IBS**

- Nordic Council of Ministers' information event on the new Russia cooperation programmes, Saint Petersburg 20/9
- BEAC Working Group on Environment meeting, Saint Petersburg 21-22/9
- Barents coordination meeting organized by the MFA of Finland, Helsinki 23/9
- Joint Working Group on Culture meeting, Moscow 13/10
- Regional Committee and Barents Regional Council meeting, Luleå 8/11
- Meeting with the Arctic Centre Science communications team, Rovaniemi 9/11
- Barents Cooperation Forum (Presentation on the financing possibilities of Barents cooperation projects), Helsinki 8/12

#### **Staff of the IBS, internships**

Executive officer Yuri Nikiforov ended his four-year mission in August and was replaced by Laura Quist from Finland. She started her contract period the first week in September. Roy Hojem's contract was prolonged with three years. Head of Secretariat, Tomas Hallberg, fulfilled his second year of his mandate. Maria Dianova made her first full year as an Adviser on Climate, Environment and Hot Spots.

The IBS pursues a policy of taking on two interns annually for a period of three months. The spring candidate this year was replaced by Rebecka Snefugli Sondell, who was the Intern during autumn 2015. She initiated the communication projects, succeeded to find external funding, and prolonged her stay at IBS with 6 months. The report was well received by our working groups and was endorsed by the CSO.

#### **Financial status 2016 and budget for 2017**

The financial situation of IBS is stable and the accounts for 2016 show a surplus of NOK 138 948, which will be added to the working capital funds. The funds will after this add up to NOK 1 579 739, which corresponds to 40 % of the IBS budget. The total budget for 2017 is NOK 3 912 000. It will be possible for the member states to make their contribution to the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in their annual payment to the IBS. The report and findings of the annual audit as well as the Financial Report for 2016 will be submitted to the CSO for review and consideration during February 2017.

## **Conclusions**

The Barents cooperation has become firmly established in many ways. There are fields where there is active cooperation on a high level, but there are also areas for improvement. The focus areas that are top priorities are also the one that works best. The continuation of the priorities, when chairmanship was handed over, tells us about the gaps to be filled. Regional stakeholders call for closer economic cooperation. Even if many roads in the region has shown significant improvements, there are still many to be upgraded. There are calls for new regional flight connections and a common platform for tourism in the Arctic area is under discussion. In addition, environmental issues are always high on the agenda.

The IBS has already assisted the chairmanships in the Barents cooperation as an auxiliary body for nine years. The office is situated in the same building as the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, The Barents Institute, Akva Plan Niva and Centre of High North Logistics. Together they form a cluster of institutions with good reputation and deep knowledge about the Barents region. We are happy to have an expert on Environmental and Hotspot issues added to the small staff team. A majority of our working groups call for more practical support. One way to help would be to strengthen the IBS with another co-worker, another could be that the national chairmanship allocates more resources for cooperation with the working groups.