

## **Annual report of the Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY) for 2014**

The main objectives of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council 2013-2015 within the youth sector and the Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY) are based on the priorities of the preceding Chairmanship of Norway, on the Declaration on the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation, Kirkenes, Norway, 3-4 June 2013 and the Joint Communiqué of Tromsø, Norway, 29 October 2013. Promoting young people's social inclusion is a key priority of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. Finland pays special attention to young people's opportunities to participate in the society and their access to education and employment. In this context, the role of the NGOs is emphasized.

### *Activities of the JWGY in 2014*

In 2014, the JWGY held three meetings (17-18 March, Helsinki; 17 September, Rovaniemi, and 17-18 November, Helsinki) where the basic documents of the JWGY were redrafted and finally adopted. After the merger of the former governmental (WGYP) and regional (RWGYI) working groups into an integrated joint working group (JWGY) in 2011 it became necessary to review and clarify the role and responsibilities of the JWGY. One of the concrete objectives of the Finnish Chairmanship was to create a well-functioning cooperation structure which meets the needs of young people and the youth field in the Barents region.

In 2014, the following documents were adopted by the JWGY (please see the attachments)

- Plan of Action (2014 and beyond)
- Terms of Reference 2015-2016
- Agreement on the financing and functions of the Barents Youth Cooperation Office (BYCO) 2015

The JWGY decided to take an active role in drafting of a new Barents Youth Program.

The Plan of Action of the JWGY aims at enhancing cross-sectorial youth policy, strengthening the dialogue between young people and decision-makers, increasing knowledge in youth issues and

promoting and supporting multilateral cooperation between youth groups and non-governmental organizations in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

The future of the Barents Youth Cooperation Office in Murmansk (established in 2002) was discussed by the JWGY in its November meeting. The Russian Federation informed the JWGY about their wish to relocate BYCO to Arkhangelsk and to move it under the Northern (Arctic) Federal University. According to the Russian member of the JWGY, this would solve the administrative and legal obstacles that hindered the Russian Federation to pay its financial contribution to BYCO during the last few years. It was pointed out that the proposed arrangement would make it possible for Russia to pay their unpaid contributions from previous years as well. The JWGY is waiting for an official notification from the Russian Federation in this regard.

To concretize the objectives of the Finnish Chairmanship and to strengthen the commitment between those involved, the JWGY organised a youth policy seminar "*Barents on my mind*" in Rovaniemi on the 15-17 September 2014. The aim of the seminar was to examine the situation of young people in the Barents region from different perspectives and to discuss how young people's participation, access to education and employment and the Barents identity could be promoted in the region. The seminar was attended by more than 60 people representing Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation and Sweden as well as the Council of Europe and the Flemish Community of Belgium. The approach where the Barents youth cooperation was considered in a broader European perspective was well perceived by the participants and the feedback was very positive. The Council of Europe "No hate speech movement" youth campaign was made visible in the seminar as well.

The Action Plan of Climate Change was not explicitly addressed by the JWGY in 2014. The topic will be taken on the agenda of the first JWGY meeting in 2015.

Appendices:

Plan of Action of the JWGY; Terms of Reference 2015-2016; and the Agreement on BYCO 2015

