



The Barents Cooperation www.beac.st

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The 6 million residents of the Barents Region share many assets and face many challenges calling for cross-border management. As a result the Barents Cooperation brings together experts on both regional and national levels in rescue services, indigenous peoples, infrastructure, trade and customs, culture, environment, youth issues, tourism, energy, and social and health-related issues. In other words, the Barents Cooperation is a useful resource for all of those who wish to benefit from cross-border cooperation and make the Barents Region a better place to live, work and travel in.

The cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR) was launched in 1993 when Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, the Russian Federation, and the EU Commission signed the *Kirkenes Declaration* establishing the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) at a Foreign Minister's Conference in Kirkenes, Norway. At the same time, the Barents regions' county governors and representatives of indigenous peoples signed a cooperation protocol establishing the Barents Regional Council (BRC). Thus, the cooperation in the Barents Region was set off on two levels: BEAC is a forum for intergovernmental cooperation and the BRC is a forum for cooperation between the 13 regions (map attached) of the Member States. The Indigenous Peoples has an advisory role to both of the Councils. The interregional cooperation crossing national borders and the status of the indigenous peoples are two features making the Barents Cooperation unique in a global perspective.

The Chair of BEAC rotates every second year between Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation and Sweden. Between the ministerial meetings, the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) meets four times per year. Observer states are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, NL, Poland, UK and USA.

Sweden and the Region of Troms held the chairmanships 2009-2011. In October, 2011, the chairmanships were rotated to Norway and the Swedish northernmost region Norrbotten, at the Session of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Governors taking place in Kiruna, Sweden.

The focus of the Norwegian Chairmanship is adaptability of sustainable economic and industrial development, environmentally safe and climate friendly development, and the human dimension.

Norrbotten's main priorities are to strengthen the cooperation in sustainable and eco-efficient management of natural resources, environment, the young generation, and infrastructure. Norrbotten will also continue the efforts of the previous Chair, the Region of Troms, to promote the Barents Cooperation and the Barents Region on other arenas such as the EU.

The indigenous peoples of the Barents Region are a prioritized field of both Chairmanships.

In addition, the BRC has agreed on the *Barents Program 2009-2013*, running over two chairmanship periods prioritizing:

- To ensure peaceful and stable development in the region

- To consolidate and further develop the cultural ties between the peoples of the region
- To encourage the establishment of new, and expansion of existing bilateral and multilateral relations
- To lay the foundation for an environmentally sustainable economic and social development in the region with emphasis on management of natural resources
- To contribute to a development taking the interests of the indigenous peoples into consideration and promote their participation in the cooperation.

The Barents Cooperation has developed successfully. A large part of the political priorities are realized through cross-border project implementation. Therefore EU-based and other funding schemes are crucial to reach the goals set up by the many bodies of the cooperation, particularly INTERREG, the Baltic Sea Region Programme, Karelia ENPI CBC and Kolarctic ENPI CBC Programmes. The Northern Dimension has a growing key-role focusing on issues of specific relevance to the North, such as transports and logistics, the special and vulnerable features of the environment, public health and social issues, and culture. The calls for cooperation and coordination between the four Councils of the North are increasing: BEAC, the Arctic Council (AC), the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). The cooperation on project level between BEAC and the NCM is quite well developed, and BEAC and AC share some environmental features – such as climate change-related issues and the Barents Environmental Hot Spots elimination.

Recently, the Barents Region has climbed significantly on the international agenda. One reason is of course the generally increasing international interest for the Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions. It is also a result of the recent Chairmanships of Sweden and Troms attempts to raise the awareness of the Barents resources for EU and world markets, to make EU actors understand the need for investments and improved conditions particularly in transports and logistics, and most importantly that the Barents Region is a place for processing industry, advanced human skills and technology, and where raw-material generated profits benefit the Region.

The parliamentary dimension of the Barents cooperation has developed continuously. At their meetings the parliamentarians discuss pressing issues as well as practical aspects of cooperation for further consideration by national and regional executive bodies. The first meeting of Barents parliamentarians - the Barents Forum - was held in Kirkenes 1997. It has become a tradition that each BEAC Chairmanship hosts a Barents Parliamentary Conference. The last meeting – the Fifth Parliamentary Barents Conference – took place in May, 2011, in Luleå, Sweden. The resolution stressed the importance of the environmentally sustainable economic growth, development of energy related issues, and gave special attention to climate change, environmental conditions and their influence on the traditional livelihood of the indigenous peoples. The next Parliamentary Conference is scheduled for May, 2013, in Harstad, Norway.

The **International Barents Secretariat** (IBS) opened in Kirkenes, Norway, in January 2008. Its main task is to make the Barents Cooperation more coherent and effective. It provides the governmental and regional levels of the cooperation with administrative and analytical services. It maintains archives, operates the web site www.beac.st and publishes the newsletter BarentSaga. The IBS has three permanent staff members and a Norwegian secondment of an Indigenous People's Adviser, and a Swedish secondment of a Senior Adviser on Project Funding. The Indigenous People's Adviser manages *Indigee* – the Indigenous Entrepreneurship Project. The national Barents secretariats in Norway and Finland play important roles in both project implementation and policy making.

The area of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region is approximately 1 800 000 square kilometres which corresponds to the combined surface of France, Spain, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, with a population of approximately 6 million. The region is very rich in natural resources such as fish, timber, minerals, oil and gas. It also has important processing and engineering industries as well as high-quality universities, research institutions and science centres. The Barents region is characterised by harsh climatic conditions, vulnerable environment and long distances which pose challenges to people, business and authorities. Three indigenous peoples inhabit the Barents Region: the Nenets in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the Saami in northern Finland, Sweden Norway and Kola Peninsula, and the Veps in the Karelian Republic, Vologda and Leningrad Regions.



Structure of the Barents Cooperation

