



The Barents Cooperation www.beac.st

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The over 5 million residents of the Barents region share many assets and face many challenges calling for cross-border cooperation. Therefore the Barents cooperation brings together experts on both regional and national levels covering rescue services, indigenous peoples, infrastructure, trade and customs, culture, environment, youth issues, tourism, energy as well as 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). The Barents cooperation was thus launched at two levels: BEAC is a forum for intergovernmental cooperation while the BRC is aimed at cooperation between the 13 regions (map attached) of the Member States. The Indigenous Peoples have an advisory role in relation to the both Councils. The interregional cross-border cooperation and the status of the indigenous peoples are also 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) convenes at least four times a year. The observer states are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, NL, Poland, UK and USA.

Norway and the Region of Norrbotten held the chairmanships in 2011-2013. In October 2013 the chairmanships were taken over by Finland and the Russian region of Arkhangelsk at the XIV BEAC Session of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs (and Governors) in Tromsø, Norway.

The Finnish chairmanship will pursue sustainable development in the Barents region with the following priorities: economic cooperation, incl. transport and logistics; environment and climate change; youth.

The main priorities of Arkhangelsk are industrial and business development; multimodal transport; technological innovations; creation of a high-tech knowledge-intensive cluster; environment-related activities in all spheres of the Barents cooperation; youth competence; cross-border health cooperation; projects on culture and sports.

The Barents Regional Council adopted a new *Barents Programme 2014-2018* at its meeting on 3rd June 2013 in Kirkenes. It aims at the following:

- To promote creative businesses and fast growing enterprises in the region;

- to increase cross-border cooperation to achieve economies of scale and quality of life;
- to support joint management and preservation of natural resources;
- to implement a joint climate change adaptation;
- to enhance innovation and research cooperation by increasing critical mass;
- to focus on missing cross-border links in the transport infrastructure;
- to foster mobility across the borders for workers, enterprises, tourists and students;
- to focus on cultural cooperation in order to develop mutual understanding and regional development.

The Barents cooperation has developed successfully. A large part of the political priorities are realized through cross-border project implementation. Therefore EU-driven and other funding schemes are crucial for reaching the goals set by many bodies of 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 partnerships on transports and logistics, the environment, public health and social issues, as well as culture. The search for synergy between the four Sister Councils is increasing: the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the Arctic Council (AC), the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM). The cooperation on project level between the BEAC and the NCM is quite well developed and the BEAC and the AC share some environmental features – such as climate change-related issues and the Barents Environmental Hot Spots elimination. There is above all a potential interface between the BEAC and the CBSS.

The Barents region has gained more international significance. One reason is, of course, the generally increasing interest in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions. It is also a result stemming from the efforts of the rotating chairmanships to raise the awareness of the region's natural resources for the EU and the world market. This includes also the need for investments and improved East-West transport connections. Moreover, the Barents region is a place for processing industry, advanced human skills and technology.

The parliamentary dimension of the Barents cooperation has been developing continuously. The parliamentarians discuss at their meetings topical issues and practical aspects of cooperation for further consideration by national and regional executive bodies. The first meeting of the 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 one – the 6th Parliamentary Barents Conference – took place in April 2013 in Harstad, Norway. The parliamentarians decided to include representatives from the Barents parliamentary cooperation in the delegations to the BEAC ministerial meetings and to the meetings at the Regional Council and Committee levels. The resolution listed a wide range of issues of importance to the Barents region, among other things multimodal transport, sustainable economic growth and education and research.

The **International Barents Secretariat** (IBS) opened in January 2008 in Kirkenes, Norway. Its main task is to make the Barents Cooperation more coherent and effective. It provides the governmental and regional levels of cooperation with administrative and secretarial services. It maintains archives, operates the website www.beac.st, publishes a newsletter called *BarentSaga* and seeks to popularize knowledge about the Barents region. The IBS has three permanent staff members and a seconded Indigenous Peoples' Adviser. Another expert, a Climate, Environment and Hot Spot Adviser has been recruited who will take on the new position in January 2014. The national Barents secretariats in

Norway and Finland have also important roles to play in the project implementation and policy making.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region with a population of over 5 million equals approx. 1 800 000 square kilometres which corresponds to the combined territories of France, Spain, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. The region abounds in natural resources such as fish, timber, minerals, oil and gas. It has also 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 and business. Three indigenous peoples inhabit the Barents Region: the Nenets in the Nenets Autonomous District, the Sámi in northern Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Kola Peninsula, and the Veps in the Republic of Karelia (but also in Vologda and the Leningrad region).



Structure of the Barents cooperation

