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WORDS FROM THE GOVERNOR

Västerbotten is pleased to chair the Barents Regional Council 2019–2021.

The Barents region has a strong potential based on vast natural resources, high-quality education and research, rich cultures and a long tradition of cooperation. During the past 26 years, the region has developed a unique people-to-people cooperation, and it has become one of Europe's most important regions with regard to natural resources.

The Barents Regional Council has become an effective and relevant regional cooperation mechanism. Together we have managed to create an area of mutual trust and stability in Northern Europe. The Barents cooperation is unique, with stakeholders at national, regional and local levels, including societies of indigenous peoples. Västerbotten bases its Chairmanship on close cooperation with national, regional and local actors. We will work closely with the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council as well as with stakeholders at all levels to achieve the best possible results.

The Barents regions share a significant number of similarities, most notably the climate, sparse population, long distances, urbanization, vast natural resources and a high exposure to the consequences of the ongoing climate change. These characteristics both impose challenges and provide possibilities for our cooperation.

The strength of the Barents cooperation lies in the people of the region. That is why the regional level is so important. Cross-border people-to-people

cooperation is the foundation of the Barents cooperation and Västerbotten will enhance people-to-people contacts, especially among the younger generation. The youth is the future of the Barents region. Keeping youth in our region is a common challenge. Gender equality contributes to regional prosperity and development. These are questions that we will pay extra attention to during the next two years.

The interactions in our northern regions and between our countries have persisted for centuries. The current challenge of climate change is making such interactions and cooperation more necessary than ever. We must ensure that all economic activities take into consideration the environmental impact and the interests of the people living in the region, including the indigenous peoples.

The Barents cooperation is a long-lasting stable cooperation and Västerbotten will keep on working in that spirit. We have two interesting and intensive years ahead of us and we are looking forward to that.



Magdalena Andersson



Foto: Ola Jennersten

A HORIZONTAL PERSPECTIVE

Västerbotten will focus on five horizontal perspectives that we consider crucial for a successful Barents cooperation. The priorities stretch horizontally through all working groups and other Barents entities.

Environment and climate

The environment and climate know no boundaries or borders. Challenges in these areas concern everyone in the Barents region and affect all fields of cooperation. The environmental cooperation has a significant role in the Barents region and Västerbotten will support the work in this sphere.

Youth

Young people are the most valuable resource and have a beneficial interest in the future development of the Barents Region. They are crucial for the cooperation, the development and the sustainability of the region. An active Youth Policy in the Barents Region is required in order to secure a sustainable population in the region. Västerbotten will continue to increase youth participation in all Barents processes.

Gender equality

The Barents region faces a demographic challenge, where the population is increasingly ageing and the younger population, especially young women, are leaving the region to live and work in larger cities in the south. There is thus a need to create an attractive living environment in order to get people to move to, stay in or return to the region.

We believe that gender equality is a prerequisite for regional prosperity and development. Often it is women that move first and in order to make our region attractive we must make it attractive for women to live and work here, then men will follow. Västerbotten will focus on gender equality as a means for regional growth.

Indigenous Peoples

All Barents countries are enriched with indigenous peoples. They possess a unique door to the past as well as an important modern voice. Experiences and knowledge from the indigenous peoples enrich the cooperation. The active participation of indigenous peoples in the Barents Cooperation is natural, necessary and has been a part of Barents cooperation since the beginning. Västerbotten will continue to ensure the involvement of the indigenous peoples in all aspects of the Barents cooperation.

Visibility

The Barents cooperation is unique in its structure and geography with its opportunities and challenges, and it is a role model for successful regional cooperation. What is being done here is something to be proud of and something we should communicate. Västerbotten will continue the work of the previous chairs to increase the visibility of the Barents Cooperation and the Barents region for key target audiences.



THEMATIC AREAS

Although the Barents cooperation has working groups in many fields, there are still important issues relevant to all of us which tend to remain untouched as it is no one's clear responsibility. The Västerbotten chairmanship has identified four such issues and will arrange Barents-wide events concerning these. The above-mentioned horizontal priorities will be part of these events as well, if not the theme of the event.

Throughout the chairmanship four cross-sectional events will take place with the following themes:

1. Predators

Animals do not know any national borders and all countries have different ways to treat predators. The management of large carnivores is a big issue for both managers, affected groups in society, media and the public. Västerbotten hosted a predator seminar in 2019 which will be developed further.

2. Children's Sport and Health

Being physically active can help us lead healthier lives. It is a big challenge for parents, schools, and healthcare to give children the prerequisite to a healthy lifestyle. Children's sport and health engages many different professions. There are also a lot of sport events throughout the Barents region that engage many people and could be developed to attract even more participants.

3. Gender equality

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We believe that gender equality is a prerequisite for regional prosperity and development. Often it is women that move first and in order to make our region attractive we must make it attractive for both women and men to live and work here. Västerbotten will focus on gender equality as a means for regional growth.

4. Telemedicine

Telemedicine is the use of information and communication technology to provide clinical healthcare at a distance. It is used to bridge the distance in rural settings and as a tool to meet demographic and economic challenges. The Barents area shares the same challenges when it comes to a sparse and ageing population and long distances.



OTHER TOPICS OF INTEREST FOR THE CHAIRMANSHIP

Financial support for Working Groups

Västerbotten will continue the work done by previous chairs regarding funding for low-threshold projects for the working groups. Improved access to funding for working groups would contribute to the overall performance of the Barents cooperation. Today the best functioning working groups are those that receive external financing and we would like to make this possible for all working groups.

Barents forum

It is rare for working groups to meet other working groups. Over the course of its chairmanship, Finnmark gathered all working group chairs and we would like to continue this practice. The Västerbotten chairmanship aims to arrange an event where internal structure and administration will be topics of discussion. How can we help each other deal with common challenges, make the cooperation more efficient, increase visibility, and enhance cooperation between working groups?

Working group evaluation

During the chairmanship, Västerbotten will evaluate the current structure of the working groups. Among other things the chair will look at member participation, best practices, challenges and the possibility of new groups.

Governor participation in Regional Council meetings

For several years, the interest of Governors to participate in council meetings has decreased. The chair will investigate the reasons behind this trend and present possible solutions.





