



SWEDISH CHAIR OF
THE BARENTS EURO-
ARCTIC COUNCIL
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XIII SESSION OF THE BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC COUNCIL

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

Kiruna, 12 October 2011

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) convened its XIII Session in Kiruna on 12 October 2011 under the Chairmanship of Sweden.

Ministers and senior representatives of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the European Commission participated in the Session, which was also attended by representatives of the Barents Regional Council (BRC), representatives of the indigenous peoples, parliaments, regional bodies, observer states and other invited guests.

Introduction

1. The Council reaffirms the validity of the principles and objectives of the Kirkenes Declaration of January 1993, which laid the foundation for multilateral cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, aimed at strengthening stability, confidence and sustainable development in the North of Europe. Broad cooperation within the framework of the BEAC and the BRC in economic, environmental and social fields remains key to achieving these goals.

2. The Council recognises the sense of unity of the Barents Region and the unique features of the Barents Cooperation with intergovernmental and interregional levels, providing a solid foundation for residents, experts, students, indigenous peoples, NGOs, and public and private sector organisations to come together on a large number of

issues of common concern across borders in the Barents Region.

3. Based on common democratic values, the Council reaffirms its strong commitment to improve the conditions for living, social well-being and gender equality, working, travelling, joint culture and sports activities and running businesses in the Barents region.

4. The Council endorses a comprehensive approach to challenges connected to increasing transport and economic activity while protecting the fragile Arctic environment. The cooperation must be strengthened in order to meet the interlinked challenges of climate change, pollution prevention, biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, development of energy efficiency and renewable energy resources, economic growth and improved transportation in the Region. The Council therefore welcomes the outcome of the BEAC Ministerial Meeting on Competitiveness.

5. The Council supports measures aimed at expanding business, cultural, scientific and educational relations, direct people-to-people contacts, including the facilitation of current visa regimes for the citizens of all BEAC Member States while welcoming the visa dialogue between the EU and the Russian Federation, and the parallel visa dialogue between Norway and the Russian Federation, pursuing a common goal towards visa free short-term travel for their citizens.

6. The Council welcomes the signing in 2010 by the Russian Federation and Norway of the *Treaty on Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean* and the *Agreement on Facilitation of Mutual Travel for Border Residents*. These agreements will create new opportunities for strengthened industrial and business cooperation across the borders in the region, offshore as well as onshore.

Green and responsible growth

7. The Council takes note of the increasing global attention given to fostering green and responsible economic growth. The Council instructs the bodies involved in the Barents Cooperation to continue exploring policy opportunities and the establishment of market conditions

that stimulate research, innovation, entrepreneurship and investments in the fields of clean production, environmentally sound consumption, renewable energy and energy efficiency - all of which are prerequisites for environmentally sustainable economic growth. The Council appreciates the interaction with the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership in this respect.

8. Referring to the *Declaration of the Environment Ministerial Meeting, Tromsø, 2010*, the Council acknowledges the capabilities of the Barents Region to contribute to the mitigation of climate change and welcomes the development of an Action Plan on Climate Change in the Barents Region that will contain concrete recommendations to the Member States and calls upon all sectors to engage in these efforts.

9. The Council underlines the importance of concrete projects, such as the *Barents Protected Areas Network*, and the work on biological diversity. The Council welcomes the recent ratification of the *Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants* by the Russian Federation and notes the importance of this Convention as well as the relevant *UNECE Environmental Conventions* ratified by the BEAC Member States.

10. The Council supports actions promoting the Barents Region and its know-how in the fields of extraction and refinement of non-energy raw materials, renewable energy and energy efficiency, as well as the development of human resources in all these sectors. The Council encourages further activities in these fields, regarding both awareness-raising and deepening regional cooperation and developing concrete projects.

11. The Council appreciates the cooperation on energy efficiency and renewable energy devoted to policy measures and to developing concrete projects, exchanging information and exploring the potential of increased energy efficiency.

12. The Council welcomes a *Plan of Action* for cooperation in the forestry sector, prioritising environmentally sound and profitable silviculture and exploring the potential of the forestry sector in bio-energy production.

13. The Council calls for strong concerted action to launch projects on all Barents environmental "hot spots" by 2013 in order to facilitate the speedy elimination of remaining assigned NEFCO/AMAP environmental "hot spots" in the Barents Region, and appreciates the recent progress made in this field. The Council further notes the practical usefulness of cleaner production methodology to exclude "hot spots". The Council welcomes the Swedish funding scheme, Barents Window in this respect.

14. The Council appreciates the increasing understanding that improved quality of surface water, drinking water and better water management are prerequisites for the long-term prosperity of the Barents region, and welcomes the outcome of the *Arkhangelsk Water Conference* in November 2010, and the *Arkhangelsk Conference on Water Management and Climate Change* in June 2011. The Council recommends that the Working Group on Environment (WGE) continue to promote and coordinate concrete activities in the Barents region and encourage follow-up activities.

15. The Council welcomes the initiative of the Barents Regional Council to develop a transport strategy for the Barents region and encourages the *Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area* (BEATA) and the Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics to identify and promote projects that are crucial for the development of an integrated, sustainable, multimodal transport system in the region, to coordinate national and regional initiatives in this field and to include relevant actors and working groups in this process. The Council encourages cooperation with the *Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics*.

16. The Council emphasises the need for continued efforts of the customs administrations in the Barents region to further develop and simplify customs procedures and remove customs barriers. Such action is a key element in reducing waiting times at border crossings and improving conditions for trade. The Council appreciates the extensive customs cooperation in the area of crime control.

17. The Council welcomes the outcome of the 8th *Barents*

Industrial Partnership, focusing on investments in the region, the availability of skilled labour and financing possibilities. The Council supports increased activities at regional level for the benefit of the development of the small and medium-sized enterprises sector, and underlines the strategic role of cross-border cooperation in this respect. The Council emphasises the importance of promoting environmental modernisation in the industrial sector.

18. The Council notes the shared responsibility of the public sector and business community for the continued dynamic and sustainable development in the Region and encourages an exchange of experiences in the field of public-private partnerships to contribute to more investments in the socio-economic development and environmental protection of the Region.

19. The Council underlines the potential for tourism in the Barents region and welcomes the *Public-Private Partnership in Barents Tourism*, which creates an overall foundation for the development of sustainable and accessible tourism.

20. The Council pays special attention to the enhancement of cooperation in the fields of innovation and modernization and development of trans-boundary 'clusters of growth' on the basis of bringing together scientific and technical potential of the Member States. The Council encourages the Committee of Senior Officials to consider actions in this respect in coordination with the BRC.

Living in the Barents region

21. The Council highly estimates the Barents Cooperation on health and related social issues and notes with satisfaction the successful implementation of the respective cooperation programmes. The Council welcomes the new *Cooperation Programme for 2012-2015*, which pays special attention to the prevention of co-infections of HIV and tuberculosis, and particularly encourages all cooperation,

urging authorities to gain full control of the spread of tuberculosis in the Barents Region by the end of 2013, as stated in the *2003 Kirkenes Declaration of Prime Ministers*. The Council welcomes close coordination with the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being.

22. The Council notes with appreciation the successful continuation of the implementation of the *Programme on Children and Youth at Risk* and, in particular, acknowledges Norway's efforts in this respect, and encourages cooperation with other Regional Councils.

23. The Council calls for intensified cooperation between higher educational institutions in the field of research, and supports the close cooperation and internationalisation of national educational systems and research environments.

24. The Council supports the implementation of the *Third Cultural Cooperation Programme 'New Horizons in the Barents Region' for 2011-2013* with the aim to promote cultural diversity, multicultural dialogue, new cultural meeting places and the importance of culture for the overall development. The Council notes with appreciation that the Barents cultural cooperation closely interacts with other relevant regional organisations and platforms, particularly the *Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture*, in order to find synergies and minimise overlaps. The Council encourages the extensive sports activities across the Barents Region.

25. The Council continues to pay special attention to the challenges, opportunities, and traditional knowledge of the Barents indigenous peoples and their involvement in cooperation in the fields of education, youth cooperation, public health, culture, sports, traditional activities and economic activity in general, environmental protection and infrastructure improvement in the spirit of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. The Council stresses the importance of cooperation and dialogue with, and between, indigenous peoples and emphasizes the importance of safeguarding the cultural heritage of these groups. The Council welcomes the participation of representatives of Indigenous Peoples in all BEAC working bodies, and acknowledges the importance of the Barents Indigenous Peoples' Congress.

26. The Council notes with satisfaction the positive results of *Indigee* - the Indigenous Entrepreneurship project - in supporting indigenous small and medium-sized enterprises all over the Barents region. The Council also endorses *Indigee* for setting a multilateral example concerning participation, funding and management.

27. The Council welcomes the merging of the intergovernmental and interregional levels of the youth cooperation, which will strengthen the dialogue between young people and decision-makers and facilitate the active citizenship of young people. The Council recognises the valuable contribution of the jointly financed *Barents Youth Cooperation Office* in Murmansk. The Council also notes with appreciation the work of the Barents Regional Youth Council.

28. The Council welcomes the early ratification of the *Agreement between the Governments in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region on Cooperation within the Field of Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response* as a significant milestone in making the Barents region a safer place in which to live, travel and work. The Council furthermore welcomes the *Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic*, concluded by the Arctic Council Member States, and encourages enhanced cooperation in this field. The Council endorses continued efforts to eliminate all obstacles in mutual assistance and acknowledges the importance of the Barents Rescue Exercises, the most recent one having taken place in northern Sweden in September, successfully combining Finnish, Norwegian, Russian, and Swedish resources in an emergency response.

29. The Council encourages enhanced cooperation between the non-governmental organisations in the Barents Region, with a view to further expanding cross-border exchanges, people-to-people contacts and interaction between representatives of the mass media.

Strengthening the mechanisms of cooperation and political influence

30. The Council notes with appreciation the XIII Joint Statement by the Barents Regional Council (BRC) at the Session and expresses its satisfaction with the close

interaction between the national and regional levels as a fundamental precondition for the overall success of the Barents Cooperation. In this respect, the Council supports the implementation of the *Barents Programme 2009-2013* defining the aims and goals of interregional cooperation in the Barents region.

31. The Council welcomes the efforts of the BRC in strengthening its political role in order to more efficiently promote the outcomes of the cooperation and influence national policies of the BEAC Member States.

32. The Council acknowledges the strong efforts to promote awareness of the Barents Region in the wider European context. The Council stresses the need to continue this work, highlighting the significant potential of the Barents Region - as a unique area on the European Continent - for sustainable growth, in other international forums.

33. The Council notes with appreciation the important role of the ENPI cross-border-cooperation programmes implemented in the Barents Region.

34. The Council takes note of the transport potential of the Northern Sea Route which is increasing as a result of climate change making it possible to develop it as a global maritime transit corridor for the benefit of the Barents Region, thus contributing to the Region's socio-economic growth and the well-being of its peoples.

35. The Council stresses the need for synergies and an effective division of labour between the Regional Councils in the North and other structures of relevance for cooperation and development in the Barents Region, notably the Northern Dimension. In particular, closer cooperation with the Arctic Council is encouraged on a project and programme basis, i.e. the relevance of the Arctic Change Assessment also for the Barents Region and cooperation between the *Arctic Contaminants Action Programme* (ACAP) and the Working Group on Environment, strengthening the capacity for elimination of Barents hot spots. The Council invites the Committee of Senior Officials to consider further actions in this respect.

36. The Council takes note of the growing importance of the parliamentary dimension within the Barents cooperation, at national and regional level, and welcomes the outcome of the 5th Barents Parliamentary Conference,

Luleå, 2011. The Council appreciates events such as the International Forum for young politicians of North-West Russia and Nordic countries, and underlines the importance and need to provide young people with opportunities to discuss, cooperate and share experiences. The Council welcomes the outcome of the 3rd International Forum for Young Politicians, Arkhangelsk, 2011.

37. The Council stresses the role of the existing financial institutions and schemes as a basis for project funding within the framework of Barents cooperation. The Council encourages the Barents bodies to explore the possibilities of attracting external funding for Barents activities on the basis of voluntary contributions.

38. The Council acknowledges the positive role of the International Barents Secretariat, launched in January 2008, in providing the Barents cooperation with continuity and efficiency. The Council encourages the IBS to continue promoting the Barents Region and the Barents Cooperation in a regional, national and global context. The Council encourages secondments to the IBS as an efficient way to enhance the capacity and expertise of the Secretariat.

39. The Council expresses its gratitude to the outgoing BEAC Chair, the Kingdom of Sweden, and to the outgoing Chair of the BRC, the Region of Troms, Norway, as well as to all other parties for their excellent work, and welcomes the incoming Chair of the BEAC, the Kingdom of Norway, and of the BRC, the Region of Norrbotten, Sweden. The Council welcomes the Norwegian Chairmanship's priorities.

40. The Council welcomes the invitation from the Kingdom of Norway to the XIV session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in Norway in 2013.

The Council welcomes the plans to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Barents Cooperation in Kirkenes, 2013.