



06 February 2023

## IBS annual overview 2022

### General affairs

The year started out on a very positive note, with the Secretariat gearing up to increased number of activities following the Pandemic. A new adviser seconded by Finland, started in January with getting the newly adopted Barents Financial Mechanism (BFM) off the ground. The first CSO meeting organized in Joensuu on 16 February was very promising with a presentation by the Presidency of the Arctic Council looking at synergies with the Barents Euro Arctic Council. The work with a Barents green transition concept paper was launched and a status report on the introduction of the BFM in April was introduced. Regarding the latter, clarifications regarding procedures of this mechanism was adopted. The regional chair presented its plans to organize a Barents Regional Council meeting in St. Petersburg in April and a Regional Committee meeting to take place in Narjan-Mar in March. Discussions on strengthening the Secretariat was also initiated with the suggestion to increase the staff by hiring a media adviser and an Indigenous Summit adviser.

In February, the permanent state secretary Matti Anttonen visited IBS where he inter-alia announced the winner of the Finnish BEAC presidency Facebook competition winners. However, the positive atmosphere quickly changed as the annual Kirkenes conference was underway, dark clouds appeared ending up with Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine on 24 February.

Contributions from Russia to the IBS, Working Group of Indigenous Peoples and BFM was immediately frozen. As the contract of the executive officer was approaching its end (August), the incumbent left IBS for another position in February. His replacement was not hired to offset the frozen contribution by Russia. On 8 March a **Joint Statement of Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the European Union regarding Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation was published**. Here they condemned in the strongest possible terms Russia's unprecedented military aggression against Ukraine. As a result of the attack, the other member countries and the EU have decided to suspend Barents cooperation with Russia, but they are committed to continuing cooperation without Russia. Subsequently, the opening of the BFM was withdrawn. Russia soon issued their response where they claimed that the principle of consensus had been broken, that the existence of the Barents co-operation without Russia, loses its meaning and publishing anti-Russian content on the Barents cooperation website is unacceptable.

Thanks to a pro-active Finnish presidency, activities were resumed in a Friends of the Presidency (FoP) format. A number of meetings in the FoP format among the remaining members (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, EU) took place. On a regional level, a high number of meetings in the format of Friends of the Future Presidency of North Karelia was organized. This was also the case for the working groups. A common view was that it is a strong need to continue co-operating among these members. By the end of the year there are ongoing work in developing new projects, plans and other activities in a FoP format.



### **Green Transition Concept Paper**

The Green Transition Concept Paper initiated by the Finnish Presidency of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, will be published on 15 February 2023 in Kemi. In that regard, the Secretariat participated in the International Conference on Sustainable Economic Growth in the Barents Region organized by the Finnish Presidency of the BEAC in Kuusamo on 30-31 May and in the Seminar on Industries' Green Transition in the Barents Region on 6 October in Rovaniemi. IBS also took part in the Northern Industrial Green Transition Investments - Analysis and Steps for Future information and working session on 11 November.

### **Summit of Barents Euro-Arctic Indigenous Sámi Peoples**

During the course of the year, the Secretariat has provided support to Presidency and its preparations for the Summit of Barents Euro-Arctic Indigenous Sámi Peoples. For the preparations and planning of the Summit, a Summit Task Force was established in April. The Task Force consists of representatives of the Sámi Parliaments in Finland, Norway and Sweden, the Finnish BEAC Presidency team and IBS. During 2022, the Task Force convened eight times. The up-coming Summit of Barents Euro-Arctic Indigenous Sámi Peoples is to be held in the European Parliament, Altiero Spinelli building. The Summit is organized in cooperation between the Sámi Parliaments in Finland, Norway and Sweden, and the Finnish Presidency of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council 2021-2023 under patronage of the European Parliament.

Upon request by the Task Force, the IBS has contacted and invited speakers, moderators, and artists. In addition, the IBS has negotiated translation services to Sámi languages to be used during the plenary sessions, cultural program, and other technical issues, prepared for the Sámi art exhibition, and developed the Summit program as agreed by the Task Force. An invitation and save the date message has been sent out to over 700 relevant actors.

IBS has, in cooperation with the local IT provider ProData, established a separate domain and contact address for the Summit of Barents Euro-Arctic Indigenous Sámi Peoples: [info@samisummit.org](mailto:info@samisummit.org), and incorporated the address into the IBS' Office system. The IBS has also established a Summit event page on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/events/475715384519487/?ref=newsfeed>. A webpage for the Sámi Summit event will also be developed <https://www.samisummit.org/>.

### **Environmental activities**

[Finland's Barents Biodiversity Initiative](#) was successfully implemented by the Finnish Chair of the WGE with assistance of the IBS, supporting the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Altogether, 17 commitments from the Barents Region have been added to the CBD portal.

The Secretariat followed up on the updated [Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation](#), collecting and systemizing relevant information as well as functioning as an information bank.



IBS has also assisted in implementation of the External Evaluation of Barents Environmental Hot Spots, supported by Nefco. The draft final report was finalized in November 2022 in English and Russian. The bi-annual Habitat Contact Forum was postponed.

### **Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC)**

BRYC was the first entity to conduct activities following 24 February as an ad hoc BRYC council meeting took place in Tromsø in a hybrid format on 10 May. IBS assisted with draft agenda, zoom-meeting room, booking of accommodation, flight tickets, meeting venue etc. The meeting was characterized by a very warm atmosphere, and many proposals for future activities were put forward. The meeting saw the participation of youth from all four countries. BRYC also organized its annual meeting, re-electing the current board as well as several board meetings.

In connection with Bodø becoming the European Culture Capital in 2024, Bodø County is planning to establish a network of youth and people working with youth issues to create activities and projects for the youth. IBS was invited to these meetings as observers and to support with ideas and possible contact information to relevant people and organizations.

IBS participated on the NPA (Northern Periphery and Arctic)-conference in Bodø on 9<sup>th</sup> November, to elaborate possibilities for BRYC to apply for NPA-funding or/and cooperate with other organizations working with NPA-funded projects.

During December BRYC attended an online Friends of the Presidency meeting with the Steering Committee on Children and Youth at Risk (CYAR), followed by an in-person workshop to be held in Rovaniemi 18 January 2023. On 22 - 23 October BRYC board met for their first physical board meeting since the start of the pandemic

IBS' support has been represented by two different advisers in the field of youth and indigenous issues, one covering the period of January to June and the other the period from September throughout December. During 2022 IBS also completed a report compiling information on how BRYC representatives are appointed from the various Barents regions.

### **Communication**

Updates of the web site [www.barents-council.org](http://www.barents-council.org) was halted, with the exception of announcing the hiring of new staff, the Barents comic strips and one new project both led by the presidency. However, the IBS continued to develop its webpage transferring data from the old page. The statement of the of Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the European Union regarding Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation on the situation in Ukraine was published. The response by the Russian federation was also published on the web page. As the online CSO archive (that were located in Finland) were no longer available in all four countries, the whole archive was moved to the new webpage <https://www.barents-council.org/> in June.

The secretariat has developed its own documentation and archiving system by producing a document guide as a tool to unify document archiving. Documents related to the Barents co-operation that are stored online are being renamed and re-organized according to the document guide. BRYC and WGIP

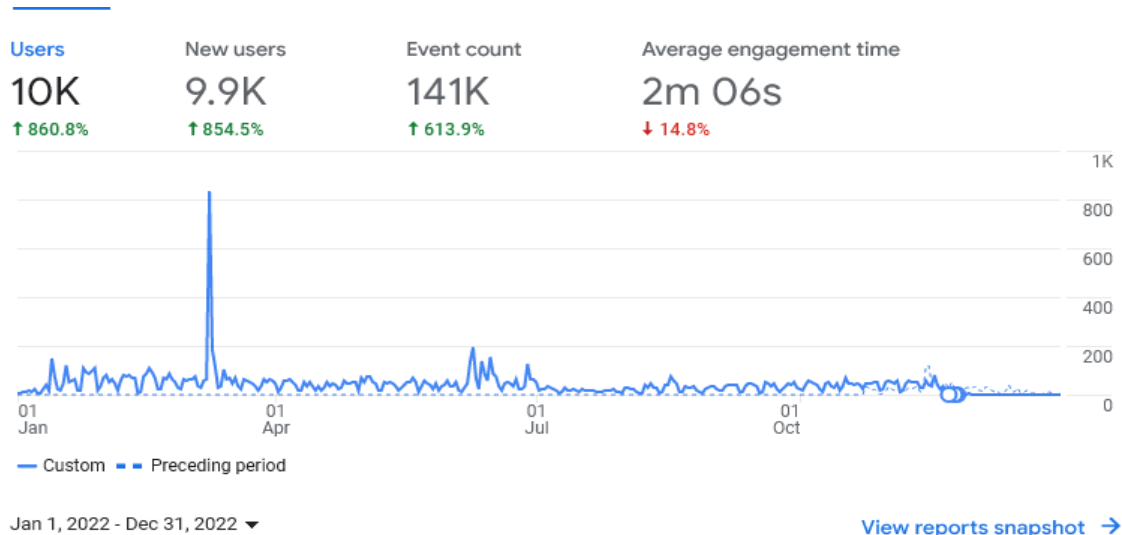


documents archived to the Norwegian Barents Secretariat will be transferred to the barents-council.org document archive.

The IBS took over payment tasks related to the domain of the Discover Barents photo contest, <https://www.discoverbarents.com/>, and continues negotiations with the provider to gain full access.

A guide on how to produce content for social media has been published. Barents Euro-Arctic Council Wikipedia page has also been updated. IBS has also assisted BRYC in updating their webpage.

In 2022 the webpage was visited by 10 000 (2021: 20 897) users who viewed the pages 49 000 (2021: 94 712) times during 19 000 (2021: 37 265) sessions. Barents Euro-Arctic Council Facebook site has 2.400 followers.



The decline in number of users could be explained by the fact that the web address changed at the end of 2021. This combined with a reduction as a result of the web page not having seen many updates since end of February.

In October IBS participated in the Arctic Circle in Iceland, more specifically to take part in the Finnish Presidency organized event “Finnish presidency of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council”, outlining the importance of continued co-operation in the Nordic part of the Barents region. The chair of Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) was one of the speakers/panellists.

### IBS general affairs

In September the replacement of the indigenous and youth adviser was hired. This is a seconded position financed by Norway. In addition, two positions are financed by Finland. The tasks of the adviser dealing with BFM was altered to include preparations for the Summit of Barents Euro-Arctic Indigenous Sami People which is to take place in Brussels 22 – 24 March 2023.



In June, the IBS visited the Sami areas in Finland and Sweden, following up on the visit to the Sami areas in Norway the year before. The meetings were characterized by an open and frank atmosphere where differing points of view were presented and provided useful background for the preparations of the above-mentioned summit.

The internship programme started up in autumn 2021 as the strict restrictions put in place as a result of the pandemic was loosened up. However, with the 24 February brutal event, the internship programme was again put on hold until autumn 2022, when the IBS attained an intern.

IBS continues to enjoy close relationships with its co-inhabitants consisting of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, UIT Arctic University and its subsidiary the Barents Institute, Centre for High North Logistics and the investment fund for Northwest Russia and Eastern Europe. The Norwegian Barents Secretariat and the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat provided good advice in developing the Barents Financial Mechanism, and IBS was fortunate to have the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in developing its archiving system.

Throughout the year the IBS continued its close contacts with the so-called sister councils secretariats (Nordic Council of Ministers, Council of the Baltic Sea States and Arctic Council). This has been particularly useful in light of the events of 24 February.

#### **Activities in Russia**

Events were also organized by the de-jure regional chairmanship Nenets. Two digital seminars were organized during autumn, one on telemedicine and one on the Barents co-operation without participation of other BEAC members. The Secretariat has been in sporadic contact with Russia's Barents representatives in both Moscow and Nenets and has met with the Russian general consul in Kirkenes twice upon his invitation. The objective of the meetings was to convey the position of Russia and to request the Secretariat to assist Nenets and its regional presidency. Regarding the latter, the IBS responded that it would not be able to provide such assistance.



## **Attachment: Overview of meetings**

### CSO meetings

Joensuu, 16 February

### FoP CSO meetings

Kuusamo, 31 May

Brussels, 19-20 September

Oulu, 13 December

### WGBC

Online, 16 February

### BRYC

Tromsø/Hybrid, 10 May - Council meeting

Helsinki, 22 - 23 October - Board meeting

Lappeenranta 19 - 20 November - Board meeting

Oulu, 11 - 12 December - Annual meeting

### FoP JCRC

Rovaniemi, 5 October

### FoP WGTL

Helsinki, 22 June – informal meeting, regional representatives only

Online, 6 September

Oulu, 19-20 October

### FoP WGBFS

Online, 10 June

Kainuu, 27-28 September

### FoP WGY

Online, 4 October

### FoP WGT

Helsinki/Hybrid, 31 August

### FoP WGC

Kuusamo/Hybrid 31 May

Joensuu 16-18 November

### FoP WGY

Online, 4 October



FoP WGHS

Online, 14 June

Joensuu, 1-2 November

FoP CYAR Steering Committee

Online, 5 September

Online, 1 December

FoP WGE

Joensuu, June

Helsinki 21-22 November

FFPNK (Friends of the Future Presidency of North Karelia)

Kuusamo, 31 May (adm)

Online, 13 June (adm)

Online, 23 August (adm)

Online, 5 September (adm)

Online, 26 September (adm)

Rovaniemi, 6 – 7 October (pol and adm)

Online, 4 November (adm)

Oulu, 13 December (adm)

Nenets (domestic)

Online, 24 November

Online, 15 December