



International Barents Secretariat

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The Barents cooperation in 2014

The year 2014 was the first year of the Finnish chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Archangelsk chairmanship of the Barents Regional Council (BRC). The year 2014 can be described as full of meetings and events in the framework of the Barents cooperation.

The BEAC Committee of Senior Officials met four times in 2014. All meetings took place in Northern Finland: Inari (18-19 March), Kajaani (16-17 June), Oulu (7-8 October) and Rovaniemi (16-17 December). The most important administrative decisions taken by the CSO were the appointment of Mr. Tomas Hallberg from Sweden the Head of the International Barents Secretariat (IBS) as of January 2015 as successor of Mr. Ari Sirén and the settlement of the financial support to the Barents Indigenous Peoples Working Group (WGIP). One or more chairmen of the different Barents working groups were invited to each CSO meeting to present the activities of their respective working group. The Chair of the WGIP is a regular member of the CSO, but also other members of the group were invited to the meetings in Inari and Rovaniemi.

The Barents Regional Council held two meetings chaired by the County of Archangelsk: on 12 March in Archangelsk and on 20 November in Bodø. The Barents Regional Committee met back-to-back with the BRC meetings. In addition the Regional Committee held one video conference on 4 June. The main focus of the BRC and RC was at the development of East-West transport connections and regional climate strategies.

The Barents working groups

The Barents working groups have been remarkably active during the review period. Altogether 23 working group meetings were held. It is worth noticing that the Working Group on Customs Cooperation (WGCC) was suspended and that the Barents Forest Sector Task Force (BFSTF) was renamed Barents Forest Sector Network (BFSN) to reflect the change in work and to better facilitate the forest sector cooperation. The Joint Working Group on Energy (JWGE) has not organized meetings since 2011.

The Working Group on Environment (WGE) and its subgroups held two meetings in 2014: the first on 8-9 April in Petrozavodsk; and the second on 8-10 December in Archangelsk, both under the Russian chairmanship. The Regional Working Group on Environment organized its meetings back-to-back with the WGE. Russia wishes to enhance the regional engagement by organizing the WG meetings with the active participation of the regional Ministries of Natural Resources and Environment. Russia continues the WGE work with the same main themes as the previous Chair, Finland. One of the priorities is to take concrete actions on the environmental hot spots. Therefore extended hot spot meetings attended by hot spot owners, regional environmental authorities and financial institutions (NDEP and NEFCO) are organized in the Russian regions during 2014-15. Both in Karelia and Arkhangelsk meetings, new hot spots were proposed for exclusion. Particular attention in WGE is paid also to the implementation of the Action Plan on Climate Change and to finding synergies with other organizations working in the same field. Concrete co-operation and joint activities are already taking place e.g. nature protection activities of the BEAC and the Arctic Council.

The Joint Working Group on Health and related Social Issues (JWGHS) had two meetings in 2014: the first on 3 April in Murmansk and the second on 10-11 December in Umeå, Sweden. Presentations on the priorities of the Finnish BEAC chairmanship were made and topical issues of the Barents cooperation discussed mainly the implementation and results of the three programs on 1) HIV/AIDS, 2) Tuberculosis and 3) Children and youth at risk. A new Programme on HIV/AIDS is under development and it will be discussed at the first meeting of 2015. Also general development of health and social status in respective member states and regions were shared within the Group. The JWGHS and its three steering committees have been committed to its work and the attendance at the meetings has been very encouraging. The participants were acquainted with the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS). It was noted that the seeking of synergy by the JWGHS with the NDPHS and the CBSS was proceeding well. They also have enjoyed several interesting lectures and a site visit to a research centre specialised on rural medicine. In Stockholm the JWGHS selected countries and regions to be presented at an internal working group with the task to draft the next collaboration program for the period 2016-2019. The draft will be discussed at the first meeting of 2015.

The Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) held its first meeting under the Finnish Chairmanship on 16 September 2014 in Helsinki. Representatives from Finland, Norway, Sweden, Russia and the IBS participated in the meeting. Major topics actively discussed were the results of Norwegian chairmanship; WGEC work and plans for 2013-2015; the Barents Forest Sector Task Force (BFSTF) state of play. The Finnish WGEC Chairmanship 2013-2015 will focus on possibilities for increased economic cooperation between the member states in cleantech knowledge, sustainable mineral industry and cross-border business cooperation.

During 2014 a new mandate for the working group renamed Barents Forest Sector Network was confirmed. The cooperation in the forest sector is an administrative part of the WGEC. A project by Spinverse Ltd, "Sustainable Arctic Mining Initiative" has been launched under the Finnish WGEC Chairmanship. The Finnish Chairmanship has also commenced the preparations for the upcoming Cleantech Summit and Barents Industrial Partnership meeting to be held in 2015.

The Barents Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics (BRWGTL) had four meetings in 2014: the first on 8 April 2014 in Luleå; the second (**as a Joint Meeting with the BEATA Steering Group**) on 15 May in Helsinki; the third on 10-11 June in Archangelsk; and the fourth (**a day before the BEATA Steering Group meeting**) on 23 September in Rovaniemi. The issues discussed revolved largely around the Joint Barents Transport Plan (JBTP) that was prepared during the Norwegian chairmanship period. This work is being continued by Finland. The findings and recommendations of the Barents Freeway project worked out at regional level will be also taken into account in this process. The JBTP has raised expectations as a step towards a more integrated transport system. So far the counties have focused on their own projects and Russia has rather seen transport problems to be solved bilaterally. A proposal for Air Transport Route Network of the Barents region made by the Arkhangelsk region was considered. A discussion on plans of further BRWGTL activities was launched upon completing the Barents Freeway project with a one-day final seminar. The Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL) is ready to support transport projects financially.

Close cooperation of the BRWGTL and the BEATA Steering Committee has proved to be strength in the field of transport and logistics. To a certain extent the participants are almost the same and as a rule the meetings are organized back-to-back.

The Joint Working Group on Education and Research (JWGER) held a meeting on 9 October 2014 in Arkhangelsk. There were 11 Russian and foreign institutions of higher education represented at the meeting in the Northern Arctic Federal University. The Working Group has new priorities: to contribute intensively to the implementation of the chairmanship programmes at national and regional levels; to participate actively in realizing the Action Plan on Climate Change and the Joint Barents Transport Plan; to network with other thematic WGs; to seek synergy with other formats of international cooperation in the North; to initiate concrete projects with business and authorities. It was decided to invite representatives of related federal and regional authorities of the four Barents member states to participate in the work of the JWGER. The JWGER initiated the first discussion of the idea to start joint work on the Barents Action Plan on Science and Education that is expected to be drawn up for outlining strategic goals in the field.

The Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY) organized three meetings in 2014 in Finland: the first on 17-18 March in Helsinki; the second on 17 September 2014 in Rovaniemi; and the third on 17-18 November again in Helsinki. The youth seminar "Barents on my Mind" in Rovaniemi on 16 September gathered about 60 young participants across the Barents Region. JWGY adopted a revised action plan that covers cooperation across different spheres of administration, dialogue between the youth and decision-makers. The JWGY decided inter alia to prolong the agreement on the financing of the Barents Youth Cooperation Office BYCO for 2015 and adopted its Terms of Reference for the period of 2015-2016. Russia suggested moving BYCO from Murmansk to Arkhangelsk that would allow Russia to contribute to the financing of BYCO. The JWGY requested an official proposal in writing. The JWGY emphasized the need to ensure the continuation of the activities of BYCO for 2015 regardless of the Russian proposal.

The Finnish Chairmanship informed about the allocation of € 50 000 via the Finnish Centre for International Mobility CIMO to be used for Barents youth projects in 2015. There have been some problems of decision-making due to the absence of regional representatives at the JWGY meetings.

The Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC) held three meetings in 2014: the first on 27-28 February 2014 in Umeå, Sweden; the second on 21 May in Kotka, Finland (which was a Joint Meeting of the CBSS Senior Officials Group for Culture, Barents JWGC, Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture Steering Committee); and the third on 4 December in Murmansk. A new mandate of the JWGC for 2014-18 was adopted and a strategy on cultural cooperation for the same period was finalized. The issue of Barents culture cooperation scholarship/ Barents Culture Award was discussed.

The aim of the three Regional Working Groups' meeting was to seek synergy by exchange of information on cultural cooperation, to assess possibilities to enhance coherence and cooperation between regional working groups and to draw conclusions on regional objectives and themes of mutual interest. Recommendations were given inter alia to convene at least once in two years, to coordinate future joint meetings with the rotating Chair of the respective councils and to bring about flexible working methods that would encourage the regional working groups to develop integration mechanisms.

The Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT) held two meetings in 2014: on 25 March in Helsinki and on 16 December in Stockholm. A Communication Plan of the JWGT based on some key statistics from each region and country was/will be/ compiled along the lines of “fact sheets” drawn up by Lapland. Information on accessibility, in particular on the new Oulu- Luleå- Tromsø flight route was provided. ENI and Interreg progress report: Now the draft report includes only two goals from the JWGT mandate. There was a discussion whether all five goals be included and the Action plan be mentioned. The Group considered its activities in 2015, current status for strategic development of tourism in each country/region and the issue of co-chairmanship rotation.

The Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) held three meetings in 2014: the first took place on 8-9 February in Jokkmokk, Sweden; the second on 24 May in Moscow, Russia, and the third on 24 October in Tana, Norway. Among the main agenda issues discussed were the permanent funding for the WGIP; the Action plan of the WGIP with a view to the content of the side events during the UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues organized in September 2014 in New York. The Indigenous Entrepreneurship project “Indigee 2” aimed at supporting the indigenous youth and developing its sustainable economic independence in the Barents region was successfully concluded in June. Until then 59 people had participated in different entrepreneurship activities. Ms. Christina Henriksen, who is a politician at the Sami Parliament of Norway, was elected the new WGIP Chair.

The Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation (JCRC) had two meetings in 2014: on 22 May 2014 in Kirkenes and on 27-28 November in Bodø. All member states were represented. Norway holds the chairmanship in 2014. The following issues were presented/discussed: The Evaluation Report of the Barents Rescue 2013 exercise; a revitalization of the Joint Committee's internal working group on exercises; a major revision of the Barents Joint Manual; possible cooperation with other Working Groups and other structures involved with rescue handling or equipment; the preparations on the next Barents Rescue exercise in the autumn 2015. The Initial Planning Conference of the Barents Rescue Exercise 2015 was held on 16 September 2014 in Rovaniemi.

Ad Hoc Working Group on Financial Mechanism Study was established by the decision of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 19 October 2013 in Tromsø. The working group is tasked with conducting an extensive study on the possibilities to establish a financing mechanism. The working group held four meetings in Helsinki (18.2., 29.4., 9.9., 18.11.) and presented its interim report to the CSO in December. The group will submit its final report to the CSO by September 2015.

Action Plan on Climate Change

The Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation was adopted by the Barents Environment Ministers in December 2013. Norway led the preparatory work with input from a consulting company named Carbon Limits. The Action Plan contains concrete recommendations for working group activities under the Barents Euro-Arctic and Regional Councils. The activities contribute to the following main policy areas: mitigation, adaptation, research and outreach.

One of the focuses of the Finnish BEAC chairmanship is to start the implementation of the Action Plan on Climate Change. All working groups are encouraged to plan and start activities in this field. An Adviser has been seconded to the International Barents Secretariat to facilitate the work. As an

example of the on-going work, the Working on Group on Environment has launched actions to develop and implement regional climate change strategies throughout the Barents region.

Synergy of the four Regional Sister Councils and Northern Dimension Partnerships

Synergy with the so-called Regional Sister Councils (AC, BEAC, CBSS and NCM) has been called for by the BEAC. Therefore it has become customary to organize once a year a working level meeting aimed at improving cross-cutting coordination and reducing overlap. The annual synergy meeting of the Regional Sister Councils was held on 1 September in Kirkenes. The IBS visited the Arctic Council (AC) Secretariat on 6 February in Tromsø and the Permanent Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) on 12 February in Stockholm with a view to chairing the synergy meeting.

Issues of common substance to the respective councils were discussed. Environment issues dominated the meeting with the AC Secretariat. Comparative tables of AC and BEAC actions and plans for pollution prevention, climate change and nature protection were drawn up for finding synergies and avoiding duplicate work. The visit to the AC Permanent Secretariat discovered that there are still several possible fields of cooperation and synergy potential between the AC and BEAC. The visit resulted in a comparative table of possible fields of cooperation and synergy potential.

Communication activities

The communication and public information activities of the IBS have been carried out according to the contract between the IBS and the Arctic Centre at the University of Lapland (Science Communications Unit). Cooperation has been smooth and efficient. A major update of the beac.st website content and layout was done in 2013. The site functioned well during the year 2014 and served also the needs of the ongoing Finnish presidency.

The Arctic Centre has provided contents and edited the BarentSaga newsletter of the IBS. The BarentSaga was published twice in 2014. The work of the IBS has also received visibility through two major Kolarctic ENPI financed outreach activities led by the Arctic Centre. The Barents Media sphere project brought some editors-in-chief as well as young Finnish journalists to visit the IBS during their courses in Kirkenes. Barents Studies produced a popular supplementary issue with one page of information about the Barents cooperation and an interview of the Head of the IBS.

Social media has been used to support sharing Barents information and for discussion. Arctic Centre's communications staff and the IBS personnel have met several times during the year in Kirkenes and in Rovaniemi.

Attendance of the Head of the IBS at various conferences and meetings

Ad Hoc Working Group on Financial Mechanism Study on 18.2., 29.4., 9.9., 18.11., all meetings in Helsinki; Northern Dimension Senior Officials Meetings on 8.4., Oslo; Collaboration between Territorial Cooperation Programmes in the Arctic on 9.4., Oslo, on 10-11.6., Glasgow; Visit of the Advisory Board on Arctic Affairs of Finland to Tromsø on 6-7.5.; "The EU in the Arctic, the Arctic in the EU" seminar on 11.9., Brussels; Arctic Futures Symposium on 14-15.10., Brussels; the 3rd round table within the framework of the BSR Climate Change Dialogue Platform on 12.11., Tallinn; "Sami - the People, the Culture and the Languages and the Council of Europe" on 27-29.11., Inari.

Staff of the IBS, internships

Ms. Anna Afanasyeva, Adviser on Indigenous Peoples, concluded her two-year assignment on 30 June. Ms. Tuuli Ojala, Climate, Environment and Hot Spots Adviser, took on her two-year assignment at the IBS on 16 January.

The IBS pursues a policy of taking on two interns annually for a period of three months. However, in 2014 only one person, Ms. Katja Jylhä from Finland had an internship at the IBS from September to November.

Financial status 2014 and budget for 2015

The financial situation of the IBS is stable and the accounts for 2014 are expected to show a surplus of approximately NOK 260.000.

To adjust the level of the working capital funds, the IBS will use NOK 300.000 of the funds as own contribution for financial year 2015. The total IBS budget for 2015 is NOK 3.708.000. It will be possible for the member states to make their contribution to the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in their annual payment to the IBS.

The report and findings of the annual audit as well as the Financial Report for 2014 will be submitted to the CSO for review and consideration during February 2015.

Conclusions

In over 20 years the Barents cooperation has become firmly established in many ways. There are, along with good results in a number of fields, also some intractable problems such as the lack of East-West multimodal transport connections in the region and the need to reactivate economic cooperation.

The IBS assists the chairmanships in the Barents cooperation as an auxiliary body. Another seconded expert in the small staff would be of use, e.g. an economist with experience of the region. The Member States should be more far-sighted regarding the funding of expert positions, two earlier, on financing and indigenous issues, were discontinued.