



THE INTERNATIONAL BARENTS SECRETARIAT
ANNUAL REPORT
Tomas Hallberg

The Barents Cooperation in 2017

In October 2017 the second term of the Russian national chairmanship and the Kainuu regional chairmanship ended and was handed over to Sweden and Finnmark at the Ministerial meeting in Arkhangelsk in October. The ministerial meeting was attended by foreign ministers from Finland, Sweden, Russia and Norway and high representatives from Denmark, Iceland and the EU. A Joint Declaration was adopted during the meeting and high media attention was given to the first Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation. The traditional Barents Parliamentarian Conference was held in Naryan-Mar in the Nenets region in June. All Barents countries were represented at the conference and were given a lot of local media cover. A ministerial meeting on Environment was held in Vadsø, Norway, late November and the first Indigenous Peoples Summit was organized in Moscow in April.

The BEAC Committee of Senior Officials

The CSO under, the Russian chairmanship, has during the year continued to emphasize the need to improve internal and external communications of the Barents Cooperation. New templates for the working group's annual reports were adopted. The Operating Guidelines for the working groups were also updated as well as a new mandate template. A process to change the rotation of the chairmanships of the working groups to follow the chairmanship of the CSO started. The first gathering of all chairpersons of the working groups to meet with the chairman of the CSO, the chairman of Regional Committee together with the IBS was launched. Well received was also the first IP Summit in Moscow. The Russian Chairmanship has initiated a discussion about a new forum, a high-level meeting, to promote better visibility for Barents issues.

The Barents Regional Committee

Kainuu, as the Regional Chair of RB and BRC set Strengthening and Streamlining Regional Cooperation as one of their priorities. In the end of 2016 they held Barents Cooperation Forum (including Online Survey) to achieve this goal. In 2017 another big project, also funded by the Finnish MFA, was Barents Nature Photography Contest with over 1.800 images presenting diverse Barents region's nature uploaded to the database and the final seminar held in Kainuu in November. One of the achievements of Kainuu's chairmanship was adopting North Karelia as a new member region to BRC. This will open new opportunities for utilizing Kolarctic and Karelia CBC funds for the Barents Cooperation. Kainuu also launched and carried out drafting of the new Barents Programme 2019-2023, prepared and presented at the BEAC Ministerial Meeting in Arkhangelsk by a special Task Force.

Working Groups

Working Group of Indigenous People

The WG had five physical and several Skype meetings. The main topics have been the adoption, update and implementation of the Action Plan, and the planning and implementation of the first Barents Indigenous Peoples' Summit held in Moscow in April. The Summit in Moscow is considered a success, and the WGIP will encourage future Chairs of the BEAC to continue hosting an indigenous peoples' event, in cooperation with the WGIP. There is a need to enhance the implementation of the indigenous peoples' perspective in the Barents Cooperation, and the WGIP suggests arranging a conference for all Barents Working Groups, focusing on implementing the Action Plan and its priorities in the work, activities and programs of other working groups.

Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation

The big Barents Rescue exercise organized in the beginning of September in Karelia, Russia was considered as a big success. This time the biannual event gathered more than 700 participants from all the four Barents countries. The organizing committee stresses that the planning and preparation before the exercise is as well important. During the year decision to improve the efficiency of the cooperation has been taken. Still there is a need to strengthen the subgroup, Planning and Evaluation Working Groups. The group also started to discuss how they can contribute to the Barents Climate Action Plan. Even if the overall results are satisfying, since the meetings are scares, it is sometimes difficult to make significant improvements.

Working Group on Economic Cooperation

A meeting was held on the 26 April in Moscow, where a discussion was held on the prospects and opportunities of enhancing multilateral economic cooperation in the Barents Region. The WGEC concluded that there was a need of making the full use of the existing potential of interaction between business entities from the Northwest Russian regions and their partners

from the other BEAC Member States. Closer cooperation with the regional groups and the potential of economic aspects of other working groups (tourism, transport etc.) were highlighted. Barents Forest Sector Network's Forum was held in Arkhangelsk in September.

Working Group on Environment

In 2017, the WGE had two meetings: in Tromsø in February/March and in Kjerringøy in September back-to-back with meetings of the WGE Subgroups and the Regional WGE, with a total of up to 40 participants each. In addition, the Subgroups and projects under the WGE organized their own separate meetings in Bugøynes, Norway, in May, in Murmansk in March and in Komi in October. Climate change has been an overarching priority for the WGE during the Norwegian Chairmanship. In 2017, the *Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation* was updated under the lead of the IBS. The document was endorsed at the BEAC 16th Session on 19 October 2017 in Arkhangelsk and adopted by the Barents Ministers of Environment on 29-30 November in Vadsø. Three environmental hot spots were excluded from the Barents Hot Spots List in 2017: Arkhangelsk Pulp and Paper Mill (A4), Vorkuta cement plant (Ko2-1) and Wood waste management in the Komi Republic (Ko7).

Steering Committee for the BEATA

Several video meetings were held in the beginning of the year with the aim to update and further develop the Joint Barents Transport Plan. A physical meeting was held in St. Petersburg 30 May. 29 September delegations from the Russian and Norwegian Ministries of Transport participated in the opening of new Road E105 between Murmansk and Kirkenes (with a new tunnel and a bridge new the border). First video meeting under the Swedish chairmanship was held on 13 November. It was agreed to hold a physical meeting in Skellefteå 12-14 March 2018 coordinated with the meeting of the Regional WG. Russian and Swedish Chairs of BEATA also met in Moscow.

Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues

The JWGHS had two meetings during 2017. The 24th meeting of the WG was organized in Oulu, Finland, 22-23 March 2017 with attendance of 30 participants, and the 25th meeting on 20-21 September 2017 with 27 participants took place in Malye Karely and Arkhangelsk, Russia. Participants of the JWGHS meetings discussed the issues of implementation of the three expert programmes, the current and future activities concerning health and social issues. Agreement on collaboration between the Helse Nord, Norway and the Health Ministry of Arkhangelsk region for 2017–2020 was signed on 20 September 2017 in Arkhangelsk.

Joint Working Group on Education and Research

The key project for 2017 was the IV Barents PhD Summer School in Arkhangelsk between 5 institutions of the Barents region. The WG also provided contribution to the updated regional Action Plan on climate change. The JWGER remains the network-based group of higher educational institutions and research centres contributing to the regional development through knowledge production and training of skilled graduates. In 2017 the universities-members of the WG, contributed into its work not equally. A challenge remains to engage into the WG activities

representatives of the national/regional ministries of education and science, and to lead the work in compliance with countries` chairmanship programs.

Joint Working Group in Culture

In 2017 the WG met twice – in Harstad in June and in October in Arkhangelsk. The candidates from the regions for the Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation were selected and awarded the first scholarships in a ceremony with participation of four Foreign Ministers from all the Barents countries. The WG also gave their comments to the Barents Programme 2019-2023.

Joint Working Group on Tourism

The WG met three times in 2017 – in Moscow in April, in Vorkuta in August and in Turku in November. Subjects covered in the meetings has been as follow: Understanding the new elements of the Kolarctic financial instrument (to be ratified in 2018), Sustainability – end Eco labelling systems, Discover Barents Nature Photo Contest and Evaluating new project proposals.

Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics

In the beginning of 2017 the WG organized a workshop in Helsinki to finalize the project application for Kolarctic CBC Programme. The application was accepted by the JMC in June 2017 and the project KO1029 BRTL can start in spring 2018. Some representatives participated in the BEATA Steering group meeting in St. Petersburg in May. The WG had also a general meeting and the project workshop in Brussels 27-28 September. In Brussels the representatives visited also the EU Parliament as guests of the Finnish MEP Mrs. Merja Kyllönen.

Regional Working Group on Environment had their meeting back-to-back with the National WG and prepared two project proposals to be financed by Kolarctic CBC, the chairmanship rotated to Finnmark. Working Group on Youth, Working Group on Energy and Regional Working Group on Investment and Economic Cooperation did not have any activity in 2017.

It is important to send the protocols/minutes of the Working Group meetings (every time they meet) to the IBS to be published on the website www.barentscooperation.org

The International Barents Secretariat

One of the tasks for the Head of Secretariat and the Executive officer is to represent the organization internally and externally. During the year the Head of IBS has participated and contributed with a presentation in all CSO, Regional Council and Committee meetings, both Ministerial meetings, the Barents Parliamentary Conference, Arctic Frontiers, Arctic Territory of Dialogue, Baltic Conference, Trilogy: Transport Investment Logistic, Arctic Arts Summit and the Sister Council meeting.

The IBS has also participated in most of the Working Group meetings with few exemptions. Of high priority has also been to work with our communications platforms, to improve our website

and social media but also to support our both chairmanships drafting documents like declarations, programs, templates etc.

The financial situation of the IBS is stable and the accounts for 2017 are expected to show a surplus of approximately NOK 81 000, which will be added to the working capital funds. The final figures for 2017 will be available by the end of January. The working capital funds will in 2018 be NOK 1 660 700, corresponding to 41 % of the IBS budget. The total IBS budget for 2018 is NOK 4 088 000. The report and findings of the annual audit, as well as the Financial Report for 2017, will be submitted to the CSO for review and consideration during February 2018.

Synergy of the four Regional Sister Councils

Synergy with the so-called Regional Sister Councils (AC, BEAC, CBSS and NCM) has been called for by the BEAC. Therefore, it has become a custom to organize once a year a working level meeting aimed at improving cross-cutting coordination and reducing overlaps. The annual synergy meeting of the Regional Sister Councils was held in Copenhagen on 14 December.

Staff of the IBS, Internships

Laura Quist, who started her mission as Executive Officer in 2016 left in the middle of the summer 2017 for maternity leave and was replaced by Roman Gokkoev. Head of Secretariat, Tomas Hallberg's contract was prolonged three years from the beginning of 2018. The position as Environmental and hotspots adviser held by Maria Dianova was also renewed for two years thanks to support from NEFCO, Sweden and Finland. The only one who, according to our Terms of References, has the right to ask for prolongation of his contract without limitation, Roy Hojem, Accountant/Secretary, has a contract expiring in 2019. During 2017 the IBS has had three Interns, Sohvi Kangasluoma, Aino Lipsanen in spring and Rosa-Maren Magga in autumn. The Internship at the IBS has become very popular. The spring call collected more than 80 applications.

Conclusions

Summing up and planning for the future. This is the way I would like to summarize the Barents year 2017 for the IBS. The ending of the Finnish regional and the Russian national chairmanship in October with well attended, on high level, meetings also called for the support from the IBS. Both when it comes to planning, preparing declarations, coordination but also addressing these meetings. There were many discussions during the year about the upcoming anniversaries both 25 years of Barents Cooperation and the 10th anniversary of the IBS. The IBS decided to have a local event, with special invited guests to celebrate this and a project group was collected jointly with the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in the end of November. The concept decided was to organize a workshop, invite for a dinner and a late reception all in one day, the birthday of the IBS, the 15th of January 2018.

The incoming Swedish chairmanship put visibility as one of their priorities for the Barents Cooperation. The IBS has tried to put emphasize on improving external as well as internal communication for some years now. With the support from our young Interns, this year we had three, we have also got more visitors to our website and social media. Still there is more to do.

The IBS, turning 10, has also noted that some of the documents and reference papers needed to be updated and initiated a discussion with the CSO Chair. The CSO has during 2017 adopted some new documents, like Annual Report template, Mandate template and new Operating Guidelines to support our Working Groups.

The IBS has continued the follow up from the Communication Report launched in 2016. One of the things stressed in the report was the lack of connection between the different Working Groups and a lack of feedback from the CSO and the Regional Committee to the Working Groups. That in mind a suggestion to gather all the Working Group Chairs at one meeting was well received by the CSO and the first of this meeting was held in Moscow during the Indigenous Peoples' Summit in April. The Russian chairmanship, also for the same reason, invited all the Working Group Chairs to the Ministerial meeting in Arkhangelsk.

Our Environmental and Hotspot Adviser has worked hard to finalize the Action Plan for Climate Change for the Environmental Ministerial meeting in November. More than a half of the Working Groups met the request from the CSO Chair to contribute. The work with the Hotspots List also resulted in that we now have three hotspots less to work with.

The national and regional transport Working Groups got their own celebration during the official opening of the bridge, tunnel and road connection between Kirkenes and Murmansk region in September. Ministers and high-level officials in the BEATA group met together in Kirkenes with the ones who actually built the tunnel and the bridge. This, as was mentioned, not only finalized a big Barents project, but also was the starting point for better communication between the northern parts of Norway and Russia.

The regional cooperation was enlarged by a decision of the Regional Council at the Alta meeting to accept the application from the Finnish region of Northern Karelia to be a full member of the Barents Cooperation.

The Barents Cooperation has a good reputation for the high level of practical cooperation. During the year the IBS had met many delegations coming to Kirkenes to explore the ground for that. In the plans for the future lays that more people should know about what happens and what's done in the Barents Cooperation.

Kirkenes, 19 January 2018

Tomas Hallberg
Head of Secretariat

Meetings and events in 2017:

Meetings of the CSO

Murmansk, 15-16 March 2017

Sortavala, 28-29 June 2017

Solovki, 13-15 September 2017

Arkhangelsk, 18 October 2017

Meetings of the Regional Committee

The 6th RC meeting 18 January 2017 (video)

The 7nd RC meeting in Alta 22-23 March 2017 (face-to-face)

The 8th RC meeting 20 June 2017 (video)

The 9th RC meeting 20 September 2017 (video)

The 10th RC meeting in Arkhangelsk 20 September (face-to-face)

Meetings of the Barents Regional Council

The 3rd BRC meeting in Alta 23 March 2017

The 4th BRC meeting in Arkhangelsk 18 October 2017

WG Meetings

WGIP

Murmansk, March 2017

Stockholm, June 2017

Glirkonjárga, October 2017

Additional Skype meetings

JCRC

Meeting in Oulu, April 2017

Barents Rescue Exercise in Karelia, September 2017

Meeting in Stockholm, 30 November - 1 December 2017

WGEC

Meeting in Moscow, April 2017

BFSN

Meeting in Moscow, June 2017

Forum in Arkhangelsk, September 2017

WGE

Several subgroup meetings during the year

Habitat Forum in Oulu, June 2017

Meeting in Kjerringøy, September 2017

Meeting in Oslo, November 2017
Ministerial in Vadsø, November 2017

BEATA

Expert video meeting, January 2017
Face-to-face meeting in St Petersburg May 2017
Video meeting, November 2017
Meeting of the Chairs in Moscow, December 2017

JWGHS

Meeting in Oulu, March 2017
Meeting in Arkhangelsk, September 2017

JWGER

Meeting in Moscow, April 2017
Barents PhD Summer School in Arkhangelsk, August 2017

JWGC

Meeting in Harstad, June 2017
Meeting in Arkhangelsk, October 2017
First Barents Scholarship handed by Foreign Ministers

JWGT

Meeting in Moscow, April 2017
Meeting in Vorkuta, August 2017
Meeting in Turku, November 2017

Other events

Information event for the Chairs of the Barents Working Groups in Moscow 27 April 2017
Barents Indigenous Peoples' Summit in Moscow 28 April 2017
Barents Parliamentary Conference in Naryan-Mar in June 2017
EU High-level event "A sustainable Arctic – innovative approaches" in Oulu 16 June 2017
Barents conference for regional councils in Southern Finland in Lahti 12 October 2017
Century of Nature Photography in the Barents Area, Final Seminar in Kuhmo in November 2017
BRYC Annual meeting in Arvidsjaur, November 2017
RWGTL submitted a Kolarctic CBC Barents Transport project proposal to be launched in 2018