



THE INTERNATIONAL BARENTS SECRETARIAT  
ANNUAL REPORT  
Tomas Hallberg

### **The Barents Cooperation in 2018**

**The first full year of the Swedish national chairmanship's highlight was the Ministerial Youth Conference in Lulea, celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barents Cooperation. Barents youth as one of the chairmanship's priorities has been revitalized, with the Joint Working Group convening again and the BRYC (Barents Regional Youth Council) becoming a regular regional Working Group. A joint Barents event in Brussels was organized together with several other Barents stakeholders among others Finnmark County and Norwegian Barents Secretariat. During the Murmansk International Business Week, a Barents Panel on high regional level was considered as a test for the Barents Davos idea. Bio-economy and smart solutions have been a theme for several working groups during the year not only those working with transport, forest and economic cooperation. This was also one of the topics for the Barents Regional Council meeting in Sykktyvkar.**

### **The BEAC Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)**

The CSO, under the Swedish 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, the IBS Terms of Reference and Administrative Manual were also updated as well as a new Mandate template. The process to change the rotation of the chairmanships of the Working Groups to follow the chairmanship of the CSO has almost finished. The CSO held four meetings with thematic reports from Working Groups and study visits connected to the theme.

## **The Barents Regional Committee (RC)**

Finnmark as the Regional Chair of Regional Committee and Regional Council set strengthening continuity through institutional development as the headline for their priorities. One of the decisions during the year was to strengthen the Barents youth giving BRYC a status as a regular Working Group and securing finance for the next three years. The committee held four meetings and the Regional Council convened twice (Rovaniemi and Syktyvkar). The Regional Council's call for a visa free Barents region got a lot of public attention. A new form of meeting with emphasis on one theme, was well received. In Syktyvkar it was transport and specialists from our transport groups were present. A joint resolution on a greener and smarter joint transport system in the Barents region was adopted. The regional celebration of 25 years of the Barents Cooperation was marked with the Barents Panel at the Murmansk International Business Week in November.

## **Working Groups (WGs)**

### Working Group of Indigenous People (WGIP)

The Working Group had three physical meetings and one Skype meeting during 2018. One meeting was held in Brussels 6 June. Among main topics there were election of new chair, application to include Karelians to the Group, the 4th Indigenous Peoples Congress and the 2nd Barents Indigenous Peoples Summit to be held in Spring 2019, the new action plan for indigenous peoples in the Barents region, and renewal of the Working Group's Terms of References and participation in other WGs. The Working Group's representatives took part in several CSO, Regional Council, Regional Committee, WG meetings and seminars during 2018. The Group has also decided to expand their participation in other WGs, and they have elected a long-awaited representative to the Joint Working Group on Culture (Alexandra Fomina). The Group has discussed the possibility to be represented in more WGs as well and to visit some regions, but it all depends on funding.

### Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation (JCRC)

To underline the importance of the decisions made by the Joint Committee in 2016 and 2017 – and the importance of implementing them further, the decisions were made about 3-years cycle for the main event, starting from 2019. Main event should at least include practical training and/or an exercise for First Responders and other activities such as conferences, table-top exercise as appropriate. Furthermore, it was stressed the importance to make the Joint Committee's work visible and clearly communicate its decisions. During 2018, members of the Joint Committee and the Planning and Evaluation Group (PEWG) have participated at the Initial Planning Conference and the Main Planning Conference of Barents Rescue 2019 in Sweden. The second meeting of the Joint Committee was held back to back with the Main Planning Conference of BR19. Apart from being practical, it eases the participation in the planning process of Barents Events. The Joint Committee could still make itself more visible at BEAR conferences.

### Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC)

The first meeting under the Swedish chairmanship was held on the 20 February in Stockholm, where the group started to discuss Bio-Economy as an emerging priority for multilateral economic cooperation in the Barents Region. The discussion was followed up in the meeting in Haparanda 26 June, with participation of representatives from the Russian Forest Agency. Closer cooperation with newly re-established Regional Working Group was discussed and agreed upon. WGEC Chair took part in the first RWGIEC meeting held in Murmansk in November. The Working Group also discussed and updated their Mandate in accordance with the new Operative Guidelines. It is expected that the new Mandate will be approved in the beginning of 2019. Barents Forest Sector Network had two meetings during 2018. They started to update their Mandate. The ambition to increase the exchange with related workings groups is fruitful and will continue. The current exchange is mainly between the Swedish chair with other Swedish chairs of other working groups. The ambition may be to increase the exchange also outside the chairmanship.

### Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation (RWGIEC)

For several years, there has not been much activities in the Regional Group. A new Chair was nominated in May 2018 for the remaining period of the Finnmark Chairmanship until October 2019. The priorities of the Chair have been to revitalize the work and activities of the group. The priority was to review if the members still were active in the group. The result of the review was that many of the members had changed their positions or were retired, in addition to a lack of members from several regions. It was also important to recruit new members for the group in cooperation with the International Barents Secretariat, and regional county administrations, and to secure funding for meetings in the working group. With new members, and a need to revitalize the Working Group, it has been essential for the members to meet in person. The first meeting was conducted the 15th of November in Murmansk, during the Murmansk International Business Week, where the new Mandate and the plan for 2019 was discussed.

### Working Group on Environment (WGE)

The priorities of the chairmanship are: To enhance cooperation on climate change; to continue the work on excluding environmental hot spots according to the exclusion procedure; to promote progress in the hot spots areas through supporting activities; to finalize the strategy for protection of intact forests; to cooperate on biodiversity preservation, wetlands and water protection; as well as to facilitate knowledge exchange on tourism's impact on Barents ecosystems. Two WGE meetings were held in 2018. The WGE has successfully revised its mandate, the mandates of the subgroups and the order of chairmanship rotation. The work on the Strategy for protection of intact forests was launched already in 2013 and in the ministerial declaration in Vadsø in November 2017, ministers called for its finalization under the Swedish chairmanship with strong involvement of relevant Russian authorities. As work now needs to be paused, the group needs to find other ways to cooperate on intact forests. Participation from the regional level is key for successful cooperation under the WGE. Low attendance from some regions hampers cooperation.

### Regional Working Group on Environment (RWGE)

The environmental work of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region is far reaching and diverse, including themes and areas of e.g. climate change, environmental pollution issues, nature protection, water management, environmental policy work, youth work and environmental education, etc. It is important that the environmental issues in this regional network are considered both at the national and international levels. Two meetings planned. Back-to-back meeting with the National Group in Piteå in May was not implemented because, of the five Russian regions, only Murmansk region was present. One meeting implemented 13<sup>th</sup> of November back-to-back with WGE subgroup on nature and water. Topics in the meeting: finalization of Working Group's mandate, current environmental information from all regions present (only Nordic regions present at the meeting) and information exchange on current issues. Nordic regions take regularly part in the meetings. For the group to be functioning participation from Russian regions should be secured.

### Steering Committee for the BEATA

The prime goal of the BEATA Steering Committee in 2018 was to update and develop the Joint Barents Transport Plan (JBTP) and seek for greater coordination and synergy between BEATA and the Barents Regional Council and its Regional Working Group (RWGTL) and Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL). Two BEATA SC meeting were held in 2018. Both meetings were back to back, and with the participation of the Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics, combined with study visits, presentation and informal dinners. A task force for the update of JBTP was established with the Swedish National Transport Administration as coordinator. Outlines for the update of the Transport Plan was agreed upon. Close cooperation and coordination with the Regional Group, the Barents Tourism group and NDPTL. Coordination with other Barents Working Group is important in order to achieve synergies. Help from the IBS concerning registration of participation was very valuable.

### Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics (RWGTL)

Barents Region –Transport and Logistics (BRTL) project preparation and the close cooperation with BEATA Steering Group and NDPTL was the priority for the Regional Group in 2018. The Working Group and BEATA increased the co-operation during 2018 by keeping two Joint Meetings in Sweden: one in Skellefteå 12-14<sup>th</sup> of March and one in Kiruna 13-15<sup>th</sup> of November. In addition, the Group's members had project meetings to prepare KO1029 BRTL project held by Skype. The Working Group Chair participated in the Barents Regional Council meeting, held in Syktyvkar, Russia in September. There was transport and logistic widely on the agenda and the result of the meeting was Joint Statement to develop transport and logistics in Barents region. Also, the Working Group Chair was invited to the All Russian Strategic Forum held in St. Petersburg in October. Members of the working group have been actively involved in their national and local transport strategy and development works.

### Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS)

The Group met twice in 2018; 22-23 March in Kirkenes, Norway and 12-13 November in Syktyvkar, Komi. There was also a joint meeting of the steering committees of the HIV/AIDS Programme and the TB Programme, in Syktyvkar in September. In addition, an ad-hoc group for

drafting of the 6<sup>th</sup> (new) Framework Programme for Cooperation on Health and Related Social issues met in Oslo in September. A discussion paper outlining the ideas for a new Expert Programme "Rural Health for Barents" was drafted and adopted by the Working Group. The work to establish a new Barents Programme and Steering Committee in this field started. The Group welcomed the Norwegian Minister of Health's proposal to host the Barents Health and Social Ministers' meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2019. Funding was offered by Sweden for a need's assessment for the CYAR collaboration. The Working Group appointed the ad-hoc group for drafting of the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme as Steering Committee of this study project. The JWGHs enjoys strong support among the member countries and regions, and the level of commitment to the collaboration is high.

#### Joint Working Group in Culture (JWGC)

There have been two Working Group meetings – the first in Kirkenes in February, within the framework of the Barents Spektakel, and the second in Kiruna in November. The Group decided on a new strategy 2019–2023 and a new Mandate 2019–2022. Also, changes to the Scholarship process were decided and a road map set for the process for awarding the Barents Scholarships for Cultural Cooperation 2019. The feasibility of a joint digitalization project was explored, and the topic will be taken further in 2019. The cooperation within the Group is very constructive. The regions have a genuine interest in exchange across the borders and there is a strong will to find new areas of cooperation. The effects of the Scholarships were made clear for example through the fact that the Swedish recipient was invited to Norwegian regions by the Norwegian Working Group members for a successful tour. During the meetings, there have been study visits included which have shown the strength of cultural life in the Barents region. The cooperation and communication between the Co-Chairs have been close and very constructive. The turnout to the meetings has been quite good, although there was in the end only one representative from Russia in the second meeting. We hope to be able to change this during 2019. The lack of sufficient funding for joint ventures makes concretization of the plans difficult.

#### Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT)

The Working Group met twice in 2018. The first meeting was held in Luleå, 26-27 April, and the second in Riga, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, because of the Baltic Sea tourism forum ongoing 14-15 November and the Working Group members were going to attend the forum. Subjects covered in the meetings were as follow: Rotation of the national chairmanship to Sweden. Current Status for Strategic Development of Tourism in Each Country/Region with short presentations by each country, discussion on common areas and possible future actions. Tourism Quality and Sustainability Programmes, Labels and Criteria in the Barents Region. Developing two informative "one-pagers" that categorize labels and communicates them to customers and companies. Gastronomic tourism. Discussions in the meetings about gastronomic tourism development in Russia. Hopefully the discussions will end up in a Kolarctic application for Gastronomic tourism. The Transport Working Group (Steering Committee for the BEATA) has participated in the meetings to clarify how to cooperate. Both groups are working with putting tourism in the Joint Barents Transport Plan. The Working Group on Tourism adopted their Mandate for 2018-2021.

### Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY)

One of the overall priorities for the Swedish national chairmanship was to focus on youth perspectives, and it permeates the entire chairmanship programme. Thus, it was decided to restart the JWGY-working group after inactivity for a few years. The task was given to the county administrative board of Västerbotten to restart the group in close cooperation with the Swedish Agency for youth and civil society. The conference 25 Years of Barents Cooperation: Youth Perspective for the Future, held in April 2018 in Luleå, gathered 60 young persons from Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. Based on those discussions and suggestion, the outcomes from this conference formed the tasks and priorities for the working group. The Working Group is to work primarily with the incorporation of youth perspectives in all Barents working groups. The working group has arranged three meetings in 2018. In April in Umeå, in June in Stockholm (held in cooperation with CBSS) and in November in Kirkenes and adopted its new Mandate. The joint working group has had more representation on regional levels from Sweden, Norway and Finland, but have not yet managed to get all the nominated representatives at national levels to take part in the meetings yet. Hopefully, this can be improved next year. Also, Russian regional representation has so far been from Archangelsk, which has showed great interest and devotion of the cooperation. The Working Group would like to see more regions from Russia to take part in this Youth Group in the coming year.

**NB:** 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](http://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 at the CSO, Regional Council and Regional Committee meetings and the Sister Councils meeting. They have also addressed external seminars, meetings or conferences in fourteen occasions.

Our Environmental and Hot Spots Adviser has provided assistance to the Working Group of Environment meetings as well as contributed to the implementation of the meetings within the Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion of the BEAC Working Group on Environment. Environmental and Hot Spots Adviser has recently started to write a status report on the implementation of the activities listed in the Action plan on Climate Change (2017). The status report will be presented at the next Working Group on Environment meeting in March 2019.

The IBS has also participated in most of the Working Group meetings with few exemptions. Of high priority it has also been to work with our communications platforms to improve our website and social media but also to support our both chairmanships in drafting documents like

declarations, programs, templates etc. The IBS has not only addressed seminars and conferences in the Barents region themselves, but also promoted other Barents key persons on such forums.

The financial situation of the IBS is stable and the accounts for 2018 are expected to show a surplus of NOK 318 920, which will be added to the working capital funds. The working capital funds will in 2019 be NOK 2 003 000, corresponding to 48 % of the IBS budget of NOK 4 192 000. The Secretariat now considers the funds to be at the recommended level, as described in *IBS Financial and Staff Rules 4.7*, approved by BEAC CSO in March 2016. The report and findings of the annual audit, as well as the Financial Report for 2018, will be submitted to the CSO for review and consideration during February 2019.

### **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 aiming at improving cross-cutting coordination and reducing overlaps. This year the IBS had prepared a non-paper on this topic, which was discussed during the annual meeting held in Stockholm on 12 December.

### **Staff of the IBS, Internships**

Roman Gokkoev, who replaced Laura Quist on her maternity leave, was appointed as her successor as Executive Officer, starting in August 2017, with a three-year contract (until Summer 2020). Head of Secretariat Tomas Hallberg's contract was prolonged for three years from the beginning of 2018. The position as Environmental and Hot Spots Adviser held by Maria Dianova was also renewed in 2017 for two years thanks to support from NEFCO, Sweden and Finland. Going on maternity leave in September 2018, Maria was replaced by Julia Bobina. 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 2018 the IBS has had three Interns: Katri-Maaria Kyllönen (Finland), Marianne Strøm (Norway) and Anna Kuznetsova (Russia). The Internship at the IBS has become very popular and the pleasant problem for the IBS is to choose among all good candidates.

### **Conclusions**

Youth and visibility are the key words I would use to summaries year 2018 for the IBS.

The 25 years anniversary of the Barents Cooperation kick-started at the IBS in Kirkenes in January with a combined celebration of the IBS turning 10 years. By organising a seminar about how to increase the visibility for the Barents actors and their stakeholders, the second priority of the Swedish chairmanship was also underlined. The IBS has during the year significantly improved the number of visitors to our website and our social media networks. A special project on publishing Barents Success Stories has been very well received. A focus has also been to try to lift

the Barents Agenda on external platforms for example Arctic Frontiers, Murmansk International Business Week, University of the Arctic, etc. The youth issue was not only underlined during the 25 years celebration. The renewal of the Joint Working Group on Youth and the decision of the Barents Regional Council to make the BRYC (Barents Regional Youth Council) a regular Working Group with financial support from the regions was also a step forward for the youth movement in the Barents region.

The documents and reference papers needed to be updated. The Annual Report template, Mandate template and new Operating Guidelines to support our Working Groups, Terms of References for the IBS and BEAC Administrative Manual were finalized.

Our Environmental and Hot Spots Adviser has started to collect information about the implementation of the Action Plan for Climate Change and approached the Working Groups with such a request. The work with the Hot Spots List continued in 2018.

Together with the Swedish and the Regional chairmanships we have tried to participate in our Working Groups meetings in a rational division of labour. A concept for registrations to seminars and conferences has been developed and been offered to many of our Working Groups and stakeholders. Locally, the IBS has also actively participated in the discussion of developing the Barents House concept with other Barents Institutions in Kirkenes. As in previous years, many visitors have come to meet us in Kirkenes. We normally meet them together with our colleagues from the Barents House to give the full picture of who is doing what in the Barents Cooperation.

The good reputation of the Barents Cooperation, for the high level of practical cooperation is one of the reasons why the IBS had received many delegations coming to Kirkenes. The IBS will continue to have visibility as the highest priority. Not only in social networks, website but also talking Barents on various arenas to make more people know about what happens and what is done in the Barents Cooperation.

Kirkenes, 7 February 2019

Tomas Hallberg  
Head of Secretariat



## **Meetings and events in 2018:**

### Meetings of the CSO

Luleå, 31 January 2018

Skellefteå, 1 June 2018

Kiruna, 4 October 2018

Hemavan, 17 December 2018

### Meetings of the Regional Committee

The 1<sup>st</sup> RC meeting 15 February 2018 (video)

The 2<sup>nd</sup> RC meeting in Helsinki 5 April 2018 (face-to-face)

The 3<sup>rd</sup> RC meeting 23 in Rovaniemi May 2018 (face-to-face)

The 4<sup>th</sup> RC meeting 26 in Syktyvkar September 2018 (face-to-face)

### Meetings of the Barents Regional Council

The 1st BRC meeting in Rovaniemi 24 May 2018

The 2nd BRC meeting in Syktyvkar 27 September 2018

### WG Meetings

#### WGIP

Murmansk, March 2018

Brussels, June 2018

Kautokeino, September 2018

#### JCRC

Meeting in Bodø, April 2018

Meeting in Umeå, December 2018

#### WGEC

Meeting in Stockholm, February 2018

Meeting in Haparanda, June 2018

#### RWGIEC

Meeting in Murmansk, November 2018

#### BFSN

Meeting in Umeå, June 2018

Meeting in Luleå, October 2018

#### WGE

Several subgroup meetings during the year

Meeting in Piteå, May 2018

Meeting in Skellefteå, November 2018

#### RWGE

Meeting back-to-back with WGE, November 2018

#### BEATA

Meeting in Skellefteå, March 2018

Meeting in Kiruna, November 2018

#### RWGTL

Meeting in Skellefteå, March 2018

Meeting in Kiruna, November 2018

#### JWGHS

Meeting in Kirkenes, March 2018

Meeting in Syktyvkar, November 2018

#### JWGC

Meeting in Kirkenes, February 2018

Meeting in Kiruna, November 2018

#### JWGT

Meeting in Luleå, April 2018

Meeting in Riga, November 2018

#### JWGY

Meeting in Stockholm, June 2018

Meeting in Kirkenes, November 2018

#### **Other events**

10 years of IBS – Visibility Workshop in Kirkenes 15 January 2018

25 years of Barents Cooperation - Youth Perspective for the future in Luleå 27 April 2018

Barents Day in Brussels 5 June 2018

BRYC Annual Event in Kirkenes 8-11 November 2018

International Session during International Business Week in Murmansk 15 November 2018