



THE INTERNATIONAL BARENTS SECRETARIAT
ANNUAL REPORT
Tomas Hallberg

The Barents Cooperation in 2019

In October 2019, the second term of the Swedish national chairmanship and the Finnmark regional chairmanship ended and was handed over to Norway and Västerbotten at the BEAC Ministerial Meeting in Umeå. The Ministerial Meeting was attended by Foreign Ministers from Sweden and Norway, Vice-Ministers from Russia and Finland, high representatives from Denmark, Iceland and the EU. A Joint Declaration along with Youth Recommendations from the Working Groups were adopted during the meeting and the Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation was awarded for the second time. The Ministerial Meeting was held back-to-back with a high-level EU Arctic Forum.

The traditional Barents Parliamentary Conference was held in September 2019 in Haparanda, Sweden. All Barents countries were represented at the conference and it was given a lot of local media coverage. The new Norwegian BEAC chairmanship invited to the Ministerial Meeting on Health and related social issues to Oslo in November 2019. The second Barents Indigenous Peoples Summit was organized in Lycksele in May 2019.

The Barents Rescue Event Week was organized in Kiruna in September 2019 with a high-level VIP Programme with Ministers from Sweden and Norway participating. The Ministerial Meeting on Transport was held in Umeå in the same month.

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. The Operating Guidelines for the Working Groups, the IBS Terms of Reference and Administrative Manual were updated as well as a new Mandate template for Working Groups. The CSO drafted the Joint Declaration, which was adopted at the BEAC Ministerial in Umeå on 3 October. In addition, Youth Recommendations from the BEAC Working Groups were endorsed at the Ministerial Meeting. The CSO held three meetings with thematic reports from Working Groups and study visits connected to the theme. The fourth CSO meeting was held under the Norwegian chairmanship in Kirkenes in late October with a visit to the border-crossing point at Storskog.

The Barents Regional Committee (RC)

Finnmark as the Regional Chair of Regional Committee and Regional Council continued strengthening institutional development as one of their priorities. Finnmark organised Discover Barents Youth Photo contest in spring. The committee held three meetings and the Regional Council convened twice (Tromsø and Umeå). A OnePager presenting the Barents Cooperation was drafted by the RC and adopted. The Regional Council signed a Joint Statement in its meeting in Umeå 2 October with a proposal to provide Financial Support for the Working Groups with national funding. The BEAC Chair Norway will investigate it more thoroughly during its chairmanship. In addition, the regional leaders met twice at the Talking Barents Panel in St. Petersburg in April and at the International Session in Murmansk in November. The Chairmanship was handed over in October to Västerbotten on the regional level.

Working Groups (WGs)

Working Group of Indigenous People (WGIP)

WGIP successfully conducted the fourth Barents Indigenous Peoples' Congress and Summit in Lycksele 27-28 May and three productive meetings (Alta, Norway 8-9 February; Inari, Finland 13 April; by Skype 24 August). As it has been decided that the Sami Parliaments in Norway, Sweden and Finland will fund the costs of their representatives, WGIP will thrive to be more proactive on arranging relevant seminars and events in 2020 and be represented more widely in other WG and on several relevant arenas. Youth involvement has been a high priority for the WGIP during 2019. WGIP has through their youth representative in Barents Regional Youth Council, current chair August Sjøvoll, been a part of planning, arranging as well as participated in several youth projects, and has also worked with youth related issues.

Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC)

The priorities of the Swedish Chairmanship of the BEAC were Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Honoring that framework, the WGEC focused on highlighting bioeconomy as a basis for cooperation in the Barents region. The Swedish Chairmanship also prioritized discussions on the mandate and working methods of the group and adopted such a mandate within the chairmanship period. The Swedish Chairmanship held one meeting on 20 March 2019. The meeting was held in Stockholm and it was, for the first time, held back-to-back with the RWGIEC, as it was one of the outcomes of the meeting in Haparanda in 2018 to have closer collaboration between the national and regional levels. During the meeting a brainstorming was held to identify future activities. Norway presented their preliminary priorities: health cooperation (eHealth), people-to-people cooperation and knowledge, research and youth. Finland highlighted tourism, the Arctic Sea Route as well as sustainable mining and sustainable aquaculture. The challenge of the WGEC to come up with concrete activities on the national level. It is therefore very important to have close contact with the regional level in order to provide support where appropriate.

Barents Forest Sector Network (BFSN)

During 2019 the network held three meetings: in Stockholm 28-29 January, a telephone conference on 29 May and one during the Forest Forum in Umeå 15-17 October. The programme included also workshops and study visits. In addition, the Chairmanship attended Barents youth follow up seminar and XVII BEAC Foreign Ministers' Session and EU Arctic Forum. In connection with this event, a flyer was created describing the BFSN and the chairmanship period. During 2019 the network has agreed upon youth recommendations. A mapping of ongoing initiatives concerning bioeconomy has been performed. During the Barents Forest forum a workshop about a report (The forest in the emerging bioeconomy in Northern Europe) was held, and the report will be presented during the first half of 2020. The ambition to increase the exchange with other working groups and strengthen the collaboration with other organizations as well as to increased cooperation on regional level has been fruitful. Barents Forest Forum was successful and 123 people (of which 47 youth) attended, and 270 people followed the main conference by video-link. There are recurring question marks about where BFSN sorts and many times it has been missed to invite BFSN as one of several BEAC groups to various meetings since BFSN is to be considered as a network (sub-working group) under WGEC. The possibility for BFSN to become an own working group, from present sub working group status, has been discussed and will be followed up during the Norwegian BFSN chairmanship.

Working Group on Environment (WGE)

The WGE held three meetings during 2019. The first meeting was in Stora Sjöfallet, 28 March back-to-back with meetings in the Subgroup on Nature and Water (SNW) and the Subgroup on Hot Spot Exclusion (SHE). The WGE discussed climate change, including a status report on the implementation of the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Region and a proposal to intensify the cooperation on regional climate and energy strategies. The work of the subgroups was presented and discussed as well as the possibilities to increase cooperation between the WGE and the Arctic Council. The meeting had a focus on sustainable tourism with participation from the Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT). The WGE held its second meeting in Skeppsvik, Umeå, 25 September, also back-to-back with subgroup meetings. The Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) and the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) participated and possible cooperation was discussed. The WGE also discussed on-going work on Nature and Water, Hot Spots and Climate Change as well as the upcoming environment minister's meeting. The WGE held its third meeting in Stockholm on 27 November. It focused on summing up work under the Swedish Chairmanship and to prepare for the environment ministers' meeting in Luleå, 4-5 February. The cooperation in the WGE works well with interesting discussions and concrete results. Substantial cooperation and many activities are taking place under the subgroups of SNW and SHE. Participation from the regional level is key for successful cooperation under the WGE. Low attendance from some regions, especially in Russia, hampers the cooperation.

Regional Working Group on Environment (RWGE)

Two meetings were tentatively planned. Back-to-back meeting with BEAC WGE in Storassjöfallet in March and in Umeå in September. Both meetings were postponed/ not implemented due to only one or no Russian regions present. How to get Russian regions to take part in the working group work is a recurrent issue at every meeting. This has been the situation for several years. This year RWGE chair was invited to a meeting in the Regional Council. The meeting was in

Tromsø in April. The Chair gave a short review of the Regional cooperation on Environment from the very beginning in 1993. The challenges in the RWGE cooperation during several years were highlighted; as the lack of participation from the Russian regions and the lack of connection to the Regional Council was mentioned. Many Environmental Projects are going on in the Region. Environmental Authorities in the Region are participating, and they are lead partners for the projects. Funding by Kolarctic CBC Programme is crucial for the project activity in the Barents region. Youth are participating in some of the ongoing projects, as bird ringing and Environmental School Activities. Even though it has been difficult to arrange meeting in the RWGE. Environmental Officials from the region meet, and they also form the Subgroup Water and Nature under the Working Group on Environment. The activity in this group is mostly of a regional nature. The Regional Council ought to strengthen the RWGE cooperation by ensuring that members from the Regions can meet in the RWGE, and they should give a mandate to the Group.

Steering Committee for the BEATA

BEATA Steering Committee held its first meeting 20-21 March 2019 in Luleå, Sweden. Main topics were discussion on the work on the revision of the draft Joint Barents Transport Plan (JBTP) and presentation on the Swedish Vision Zero (Road Safety) and the next global ministerial conference on Road Safety in Stockholm in 2020. The Steering Committee held its second meeting 27 August 2019 in Stockholm, Sweden. Main topics were Preparations for the transport ministerial meeting and finalization of ministerial declaration, finalization of Youth Recommendation to Foreign Ministers Session in October 2019 and presentation of the incoming chair's priorities. Transport Ministerial Meeting of the Member States of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) was held 11-12 September 2019 in Umeå, Sweden under the theme *Sustainable transport solutions in the Barents Region*. Main results of the year were a revised Draft Joint Barents Transport Plan presented by the JBTP Working Group and the Ministerial Declaration adopted by the transport ministers in Umeå September 2019. There was an improved synergy with Tourism Working Group regarding transport. Agreement on participation in BWGTL Kolarctic project was made - invitations will be sent to representative of BEATA for possible participation. Recommendations were made to the BEAC Ministerial Meeting 3 October 2019 in Umeå on Youth and Road Safety. Coordination with other Barents working groups is important in order to achieve synergies. Help from IBS concerning registration of participation to the ministerial meeting was very valuable.

Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics (RWGTL)

During the reporting period, RWGTL members have been actively participating to the Kolarctic CBC funded project meetings as project partners and steering group members. The group has gathered to the following meetings: 6-7 February kick-off meeting in Kajaani, Finland; 21-22 March BEATA meeting in Luleå, Sweden; 23-24 April RWGTL meeting and project meeting in Stockholm, Sweden, and 11-12 September project meeting in Umeå, Sweden, back-to-back with BEATA ministerial meeting. The core events in 2019 have been implementation and monitoring of Kolarctic CBC funded project activities and commenting JBTP working process. The Chairman of the Working group was present in the Regional Council meeting in April in Tromsø, Norway. One of the biggest achievements during the reporting period was the launching of the BRTL Kolarctic CBC project. The working group members have indicated their commitment to the implementation to the project activities. The project implementation has increased communication and activities inside the working group and thus brought added value for the

Barents cooperation. Nevertheless, there is a demand for cross-sectoral activities and deeper cooperation between the both governmental and regional working groups, as well as engaging youth to the RWGTL work. This will be one of the main targets for the next operational year.

Joint Working Group in Culture (JWGC)

There have been two formal meetings – the first one in Varanger in April, and the second in Umeå in October, within the framework of the BEAC Ministerial Meeting events. In addition, an informal ad-hoc meeting took place in Rovaniemi in June to discuss the Barents Scholarship ceremony. In Varanger, the JWGC presented the regions candidates for the Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation and decided on the recipients. A decision on the recipient from Russia was delayed until autumn. The Scholarship ceremony was discussed, as well as the need to review the Scholarship guidelines. The development of a digitalization workshop involving youth was also discussed. The JWGC decided on its Youth Recommendations and agreed that including youth in the Barents scholarship event is a constructive way to increase youth involvement in the cultural sphere of the Barents region. On 3 October, the Scholarship ceremony took place within the framework of the events of the BEAC Ministerial Meeting, and the Scholarships were presented to the recipients by the foreign ministers/deputy foreign ministers of the Barents Countries. Also, in Umeå, the Finnmark-Sweden Chairmanship 2017 – 2019 handed the Chairmanship over to Västerbotten and Norway for 2019-2021. During these meetings, a lot of time was devoted to sharing information between the regions regarding current initiatives and calls for cooperation. The turnout to the meetings has been very good from all regions. We hope this will continue into the Västerbotten-Norway Chairmanship period 2019-2021. The lack of sufficient funding for joint ventures makes further development and substantiation of the plans of the JWGC challenging. A short video about the meeting in Varanger in April was made by the IBS Intern and published on the Barents Cooperation YouTube channel.

Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT)

The Joint Working Group on Tourism met twice in 2019. The first meeting was held in Kiruna, 10-12 June, and the second in Stockholm, on the 4th of November. Subjects covered in the meetings were among others Tourism Quality and Sustainability Programmes, Labels and Criteria in the Barents Region. The Joint Working Group on Tourism has produced two informative “one-pagers” that categorize labels and communicates them to customers and companies. Discussions about gastronomic tourism development in Russia. Including latest statistics on tourism developments in the revised Joint Barents Transport Plan and contributing to the Youth Recommendations adopted by the BEAC Foreign Ministers were tasks of the JWGT in 2019. A short video about the meeting in Kiruna in June was made by the IBS Intern and published on the Barents Cooperation YouTube channel. In the end of 2019, a discussion was started to engage Northern Norway Tourist Board to take over the Chairmanship in this Working Group.

Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY)

JWGY has met once this year, in Tromsø 4 April, back-to-back to a workshop held 3 April on the Barents cooperation organized by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Finnmark regional presidency. 16 persons were present at the meeting, including the national representatives from all four countries, representatives from two regions in Sweden, Norway and Finland, and one representative from Russia. Main topics on the meeting was to discuss proposed youth

recommendations from our own working group and the process on how this was coordinated related to the other working groups in the Barents cooperation. Deadline of submitting the different youth recommendations was end of May, and after that the Swedish ministry of Foreign Affairs have coordinated and streamlined the different proposals. JWGY at regional level have also conducted a survey on how the different regions communicate with respective BRYC representative and how they are (s)elected in each region. Although there was a low response rate from the different members, the survey shows that currently there is not a similar approach in the regions, some work better and some regions have room for improvement. Most likely, some ideas to streamline parts of the processes or communication flow between regional members and BRYC representatives could be foreseen in the future. The work within JWGY is now up and running, the formal framework documents such as terms of reference etc. are in place since the end of 2018. Youth issues have been put high on the Barents Agenda with the exercise of all the different working groups identifying and developing their own youth recommendations, which were adopted at the Umeå BEAC Ministerial Meeting 3 October.

Joint Working Group on Health and Social Issues (JWGHS)

The first Barents Health Ministers Meeting took place in Oslo 12 November. The meeting was chaired by the Norwegian Minister of Health Mr. Bent Høie. State secretaries and other high-level representatives took part from the Barents countries (Sweden, Finland, Russia and Norway) and regions. The conclusions by the chair are available on the IBS home page. The 6th Barents Framework programme for collaboration in health and related social issues (2020-2023) was adopted, as well as specialized programmes on HIV and TB and on New technology and methods for health care in sparsely populated areas. Two regular JWGHS meetings took place: one in Tromsø, Norway (March) and one in Syktyvkar, Komi (September). The JWGHS enjoys strong support both nationally and from all the participating regions. Representatives are from the Ministries of Social Affairs and Health on national and regional level. The JWGHS appreciates that health has been chosen as main priority area of the current Norwegian BEAC Chairmanship, and the initiative made to arrange a conference on new technologies and methods in 2020.

NB: Annual Reports of the JCRC and the BRYC have not been submitted by 10 January. All annual reports are published on www.barentscooperation.org website!

The International Barents Secretariat (IBS)

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 many occasions. The Head of Secretariat moderated two high-level sessions on the Barents Cooperation, one in St-Petersburg on 10 April and one in Murmansk on 14 November.

Our Environmental and Hot Spots Adviser has assisted 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. A status report on the

implementation of the activities listed in the Action plan on Climate Change (2017) was presented for the Working Group on Environment.

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 and providing technical support for the meetings (electronic registrations).

During the year 2019 the Barents Cooperation website www.barentscooperation.org was visited by 23 736 users who viewed the pages 96 410 times during 38 741 sessions. The average time of the sessions was 2:46 minutes during which time the user visited three pages. 74 % of the users read the pages with a desktop computer, 23% used the website with mobile phone. In comparison to earlier years it was a new record in number of page views (for example, in 2018 the website was viewed 81 638 times by 16 668 users).

The financial situation of the IBS is stable and the accounts for 2019 are expected to show a surplus of approx. NOK 170 000, which will be added to the working capital funds. The working capital funds will in 2020 then be NOK 2 173 000, corresponding to almost 50 % of the IBS budget of NOK 4 384 000. 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 2019, will be submitted to the CSO for review during February/March 2020.

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 annual meeting was held in Tromsø on 4-5 December, hosted by the Arctic Council Secretariat.

Staff of the IBS, Internships

Head of Secretariat **Tomas Hallberg**'s contract was earlier prolonged for three years until the end of 2020. **Roman Gokkoev** continued his position as Executive Officer in 2019 within a three-year contract (until Summer 2020). The position as Environmental and Hot Spots Adviser held by **Maria Dianova** was also renewed for two years until the end of 2019 thanks to support from NEFCO, Sweden and Finland. Going on maternity leave in September 2018, Maria was replaced by **Julia Bobina**, who held this position throughout the year 2019. **Roy Hojem**, in accordance with the Terms of References, asked for and was granted prolongation of his position as Accountant/Secretary in the CSO meeting in October. During 2019 the IBS has had three Interns: **Valentin Strömberg** (Sweden), **Elli Alasaari** (Finland) and **Liubov Timonina** (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, news flow and visibility are the key words I would use to summaries year 2019 for the IBS. Youth has been one of the highest priorities for the Swedish chairmanship. The incoming Norwegian chairmanship also declared that this work will continue. It also was reflected at the BEAC Ministerial Meeting where youth representatives were able to speak to the ministers.

A new area for cooperation on large carnivores was test-launched at a seminar in Svanselse. It was an initiative from the incoming Regional Council's chair Governor of Västerbotten, Magdalena Andersson, who invited the Sami people, hunters, large carnivore specialist, administrators, politicians etc. for a joint discussion. The predators know no borders, but we have several different views and rules in the Barents region. The IBS took part in the planning and implementation of the seminar. There is a plan to continue the discussion in Arkhangelsk in 2020.

The IBS Executive Officer took a course in how to make short videos and the Barents Cooperation now has its own YouTube channel. The number of visitors to our website and social media networks are rising every year and the concept for registering to the Barents events is now used on regular basis by many of our stakeholders.

The Barents Davos concept, a platform for discussing the Barents issues on high political level, is developing and the IBS was actively involved in planning and performing two big events in Russia.

Our Environment and Hot Spot Adviser has continued to work with the two Working Groups, supporting their meetings as a liaison with the Russian counterparts. The work on Hot Spots continued and some more exclusions are planned for the Ministerial Meeting in February 2020.

Together with the Swedish and the Finnmark chairmanships we have tried to participate in the Working Groups meetings in a rational division of labour. Locally, the IBS has also been engaged in developing the Barents House concept with other Barents institutions in Kirkenes. The house where the IBS has its offices is shared by six other institutions. In 2020 there will be a big sign, "*Barents Huset*", on the building as a marker for the collective importance of the Barents Cooperation on all levels. As in previous years, many visitors came 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 has received so many delegations coming to Kirkenes. The IBS will continue to have visibility as the highest priority. Not only on social media and our website, but also talking Barents on various arenas to make more people know about what happens and what is done and achieved in the Barents Cooperation.

Kirkenes, 10 January 2020

Tomas Hallberg
Head of Secretariat

Meetings and events in 2019:

Meetings of the CSO

CSO meeting in Piteå, 26-28 March 2019
CSO meeting in Stockholm, 13 June 2019
CSO meeting in Umeå, 2 October 2019
CSO meeting in Kirkenes, 28-29 October 2019

Meetings of the Regional Committee

RC meeting in Tromsø, 2 April 2019
RC meeting in Stockholm, 26 June 2019
RC meeting in Umeå, 2 October 2019

Meetings of the Barents Regional Council

BRC meeting in Tromsø, 4 April 2019
BRC meeting in Umeå, 2 October 2019

WG Meetings

WGIP

Meeting in Alta, 8-9 February 2019
Meeting in Inari, 13 April 2019
Skype Meeting, 24 August 2019

JCRC

Meeting in Murmansk, 11-12 April 2019
Meeting in Kiruna, 26 September 2019

WGEC

Meeting in Stockholm, 13 March 2019

RWGIEC

Meeting back-to-back with WGEC

BFSN

Meeting in Stockholm, 29 January 2019 (Forestry and Water Conference)
Meeting in Umeå, 15 October 2019 (Forest Forum)

WGE

Several subgroup meetings during the year
Meeting in Piteå, 26-28 March 2019
Meeting in Umeå, 24-25 September 2019
Meeting in Stockholm, 27 November 2019

RWGE

Meeting back-to-back with WGE

BEATA

Meeting in Luleå, 20-21 March 2019

Meeting in Stockholm, 27 August 2019

Transport Ministerial Meeting in Umeå, 11-12 September 2019

RWGTL

Meeting back-to-back with WGE

JWGHS

Meeting in Tromsø, 19-20 March 2019

Meeting in Sykkvika, 17-18 September 2019

Health Ministerial Meeting in Oslo 12 November 2019

JWGC

Meeting in Varanger, 23-25 April 2019

Meeting in Umeå, 3 October 2019 (Barents Scholarship Award Ceremony)

JWGT

Meeting in Kiruna, 10-12 June 2019

Meeting in Stockholm, 4-5 November 2019

JWGY

Meeting in Tromsø, 3-4 April 2019

Other events

BRYC Annual Event in Joensuu 14-17 February 2019

Northern Potential in the Barents Region in Joensuu 14-15 February 2019

Barents Predators Seminar in Svanele 5 March 2019

International Session during the Arctic Forum in St. Petersburg 10 April 2019

Indigenous People's Congress and Summit in Lycksele 27-28 May 2019

Barents Youth Follow-Up Seminar in Luleå 12 June 2019

Habitat Contact Forum in Murmansk 17-20 June 2019

BRYC Annual Event in Vuokatti 15-18 August 2019

Barents Parliamentary Conference in Haparanda 16-18 September 2019

Barents Rescue 2019 in Kiruna 23-27 September 2019

BEAC Ministerial Meeting in Umeå 3 October 2019

International Session in Murmansk 14 November 2019

High Level Event on Regional Cooperation in the North in Helsinki 29 November 2019

Sister Council Meeting in Tromsø 4-5 December 2019

Russian Working Groups Coordination Meeting in Moscow 12 December 2019