



**Policy development, information & knowledge exchange,  
training, networking and exercises**

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A proposal for enhancing cooperation in the area of preparedness within the  
Barents Rescue Cooperation

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**A report from the Exercise Working Group under the  
Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation**

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## 1. Background and purpose

Within the Barents Rescue Cooperation (hereinafter BRC) in the area of preparedness, an exercise cycle has evolved over the last years where the contracting parties every second year (i.e. every eight year for each country) are executing a full-scale field exercise. Even though such an event can lead up to some valuable experiences, it has been discussed whether such an effort is the most effective way to fulfill the intention of the Agreement between the Governments in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region on Cooperation within the field of Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (hereinafter the Agreement).

In its meeting at Kirkenes, 2-3 May 2014, the Barents Joint Committee discussed this issue based on a briefing by the Exercise Working Group (hereinafter the EWG). The briefing presented some possible future options on how to rethink the present path of cooperation. The different options brought forward issues such as level of ambition with the cooperation, what kind of results you want to achieve, available capacities as well as costs.

The Joint Committee concluded that future cooperation should down-scale the present complexity and exercise format of the present exercise cycle that has developed. Based on this conclusion, the EWG was tasked to develop a new platform for future cooperation in the field of “training, exercises and network maintenance” as the present paragraph 4 reads in the Joint Manual. The task also included to revise and propose new wording in relevant parts of the Joint Manual.

This report from the EWG put forward a proposal in line with the task given from the Joint Committee. It briefly goes through relevant parts of the Agreement and Joint Manual from where you can derive the basis for the cooperation. It also discusses some basic issues leading up to the main ideas and thoughts for what is being proposed. New text for the Joint Manual is presented together with some final remarks. Since the Joint Committee was clear in its decision on a future direction, the report does not present an in-depth analysis of any earlier possible shortcomings.

## 2. Why cooperate? - the Barents Agreement and its overall objectives

In order to understand the basis for why this cooperation exists, and to be able to rethink the present format of cooperation, it is necessary to briefly look into the foundation and intentions of the cooperation. In the Agreement, the EWG would like to highlight the following three preambles which we find are of more precise relevance for the purpose of this report:

“- ....to facilitate the provision of mutual assistance in the event of natural or man-made disasters or other emergency situations in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, including rendering assistance to persons in distress;

- considering the benefits for the Contracting Parties from exchanges of information and experience on the prevention and management of emergencies, and on limitation and elimination of their consequences, and the conduct of joint training and exercises;

- desiring to develop their collaboration within the framework of their respective national legislations without prejudice to existing bilateral or multilateral obligations and commitments;

Article 2 include “joint exercises and training” as a central part of the scope of the Agreement and parts of Article 4, furthermore, outlines the role of the Joint Committee as well as an indication on possible areas of cooperation:

“(…)

The Joint Committee shall meet annually or when necessary to plan and coordinate collaboration and to evaluate the application of the present Agreement. The Joint Committee shall, *inter alia*, initiate and participate in the planning of exercises and joint training, update the Joint Manual and organise the exchange of experts.”

Finally, paragraph 1 of the Joint Manual stipulate that the Joint Committee can decide on “other information” to be entered into the manual according to its own decision:

“- Provide other information of relevance to the objective of strengthening cooperation on emergency prevention, preparedness and response in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.”

Based on this, the EWG concludes that the Joint Committee has a rather wide mandate to decide upon formats of cooperation in the area of preparedness. EWG also notes that there is nothing in the Agreement or Joint Manual that requires any actor to arrange large scale field exercises.

### 3. Discussion

If you analyse the content of the Joint Manual you will find that the present cycle of large and rather complex full scale field exercises that has evolved over time, does not really follow any requirements stipulated under 4.2 Exercises. The role of the Joint Committee is mentioned, but this is a function that the Joint Committee, as it seems, has not lived up to. Furthermore, what is mentioned under 4.1 Training, is an activity that does not exist today. Also, the “test of communications ... monthly...”, which is mentioned in 4.3, is not being performed. This is rather performed once every two year as an Alarmex within the larger field exercise.

Obviously, there is a need for a revision of the Joint Manual only looking into these paragraphs. The text does not reflect reality. But, as has been described shortly in the background and purpose to this report, the Joint Committee has expressed a wish that goes beyond a mere superficial revision of the text. There is an underlying assumption here that can be analysed with the assistance of the following modell:

	Right way	Wrong way
Right thing		
Wrong thing		

Based on this, the question can be raised whether the activities undertaken within the present Joint Manual can be placed in the upper left corner, that is: are we doing the right things in the right way?

There are in fact four quite distinct areas mentioned in the Joint Manual (1.Introduction) which should, and still can, form the basis for the cooperation:

- ... procedures for early warning...
- ... procedures for requesting assistance ...
- ... procedures for border crossing...
- ... other information of relevance...

The EWG has obviously not been able to look deeply into the possible “effects” of undertaken activities – which presently is limited to the full scale field exercise every second year – and whether or not the exercises have been able to fully meet the intentions according to the four bullets above? Obviously, the exercises over the last couple of years have touched upon all of these aspects. Nevertheless, as evaluations indicate, more focus has been given to practical field (training) activities for rescue services, whereas other and more crucial aspects and their related target groups (administrative/legal/political) have not been given enough attention.

With the task given by the Joint Committee to the EWG, there was obviously already a common understanding of the need to find new formats of cooperation as well as make necessary changes to the text in the Joint Manual. In its coming deliberations, the Joint Committee perhaps can find it useful to use this model in order to analyse how, and if different proposals for joint activities are in accordance with the intention of the Agreement as well as the (future revised) Joint Manual as being proposed in this report.

Finally, the EWG has also reflected upon the fact that the cooperation is based on the political will of four countries and, with an international Agreement as its foundation, that the Joint Committee needs to take into consideration what this might imply for the different signatories when deciding upon the future direction of joint activities.

## **4. Proposal on new text in the Barents Joint Manual**

Below, the EWG proposes the following changes to paragraph 3.4 and the whole paragraph 4 in the Joint Manual. Compared to the present Joint Manual, the text proposed now is longer. The EWG concludes that since the Joint Manual is named “manual”, the whole idea must be to be clear enough about the content so there will be no doubt concerning the main direction. Still, it is not a manual that tells anyone exactly how to do things and it still gives freedom for the Joint Committee and responsible parties to discuss contents, formats etc.

The following text (everything below the blue headings) written with the intention to be “cut-and-pasted” into a revised manual.

### **4.1 New paragraph 3.4**

#### ***3.4. Risks and types of operations***

The northern regions are increasingly being used for natural resources extraction, transport,

tourism and other economic purposes. The region is characterized by long and strenuous distances between economic centres, sparsely populated rural communities, limited rescue personnel and equipment, and restricted means for transport and hospital resources available in case of larger accidents. Moreover the emergency services in the region may be hampered by severe weather conditions and during winter months also darkness and extreme cold.

Risk scenarios for major accidents, natural disasters, and man-made emergencies show many similarities in the Barents Region and may occur both at land and at sea. The emergencies calling for cross-border cooperation vary and include daily routine emergencies, major accidents and large scale disasters affecting one or several countries in the region. Examples could be major fires in urban or rural areas, dam failures, environmental hazards due to climate change, CBRNE-related accidents, land-slides, major traffic accidents etc.

Regardless of type of incident, countries need to have proper administrative and operative arrangements in place to be able to assist each other if the need arise.

## 4.2 New paragraph 4

# 4. Emergency preparedness activities

Activities undertaken under this Joint Manual should be guided by the following **overall purpose**:

“To enhance the effectiveness of organisations, as well as develop individual skills, in order to facilitate cross-border cooperation and improve emergency response operations in the Barents Region.”

According to Article 4 in the BEAC Agreement, the Joint Committee shall give directives, as well function as a steering group, for activities undertaken under this agreement.

While planning an activity under this agreement, participating actors should use earlier experiences - from evaluations, real accidents, reports, etc – as well as findings from new research and other sources.

The content of activities should focus on the main aspects of this Joint Manual:

- alarming procedures and routines
- the ability to give and receive international assistance
- legal and administrative issues concerning border crossing procedures
- information management and sharing of common situational awareness
- skills development for rescue services in themes specific for the Barents region

## 4.1 Types of activities

Following is a list and grouping of activities which can be used in the joint Barents emergency preparedness process. Several of these activities may be implemented in a single larger event or carried out separately, according to assessment of needs by the Joint Committee. Within the scope of this Joint Manual, an ambition is to recurrently carry out a “Barents Rescue Event” (See Appendix 1, Joint Committee Strategic Planning and Barents Rescue Event Cycle).

#### **4.1.1. Policy development**

High level joint effort to develop and advocate the policies, strategies and common understanding of dealing with risks in the north. This is a constant obligation and task of the Joint Committee as well as other standing mutual organisations.

- Such efforts may further be promoted as an integrated part in a Barents Event or other High level meetings and Conferences.

#### **4.1.2 Information & knowledge exchange**

The risk exposure in the north is continuously evolving and similarly are the methods & techniques in dealing with emergencies being constantly developed. Also the emergency response capacities within the region keep changing. Shared knowledge on best practices, new methods & techniques as well as information of response capacities in dealing with northern risks is useful in developing of optimal response plans.

- The information & knowledge exchange may be carried out by lectures, presentations on incidents and emergency operations as well as by disseminating the information of the capacities to relevant neighboring organisations.

#### **4.1.3 Training (individual skills development)**

The risks and threats in the north are common so there is a place for joint training. Bearing in mind the costs and other challenges in traveling within the region, focus should be on themes specific for the Barents region (example cold climate) and where joint training activities creates an added value for the competence development of rescue services which could not be achieved by each individual country.

- Training can be done through class room activities, field training and sharing of good practices. Possibilities to share e-learning methods for distant learning should be an option. Another option could be shorter exchange of employees between organisations (a train-the-trainer concept).

#### **4.1.4 Networking**

The overall situational awareness of the northern emergency response reality will be greatly enhanced through networking of individuals and organisations. This will promote the awareness of the capabilities and way of work of the neighbors and expedite the communication and decision making during a real emergency.

- This is a methodological issue rather than an activity in itself. Networking though needs to be carefully facilitated, and given enough time to create necessary opportunities, and should be part of any joint Barents Rescue activity.

#### **4.1.5 Exercises**

Exercises as an activity should primarily focus on areas which facilitate the implementation of the Agreement as well as the main aspects of the Joint Manual. Any exercise activity need to begin with identifying a purpose and objectives, being based on findings on which aspects of the manual that needs to be improved. Exercises shall not include training according to 4.1.3

since such activities can be handled more cost-efficiently outside the exercise format. The results from exercises shall in a systematic way be used to formulate action plans identifying areas where improvements are necessary.

- For the purpose of fulfilment of the intentions of this Joint Manual, table-top exercises is probably a preferred exercise format, but simulation as well as field exercises can still be useful if supported by identified purpose and objectives.

## 4.5 Target groups

The target groups for the emergency preparedness activities within the region can consist of all possible actors in the chain that take part or have a role in developing the emergency preparedness. Depending on needs, different target groups can be selected for participation in different activities and events. The target groups include:

- Ministerial representatives
- High level policy and/or decision makers
- Representatives from regional administrative bodies
- Civil servants in the public administration from central, regional and local agencies
- Staff from emergency rescue services
- Private sector

## 5 Implementation

### 5.1 The role of the Joint Committee

To be able to change the direction of the present formats of cooperation according to the above, the Joint Committee needs to play a more active role. This role is already described in Article 4 in the Agreement and also referred to in the new text of the Joint Manual as suggested above. This steering function is a key to be able to give directions and guidance on how to best fulfil the intentions of the Agreement and the Joint Manual.

### 5.2 The Barents Rescue Event Cycle

To implement the suggestions on changes in the Joint Manual, as well as meeting the underlying discussion on cost-effectiveness and best use of resources, the EWG also proposes a revised "Barents Rescue Event Cycle" (Appendix 1). The main difference with this cycle is that is based on three years, giving time for individual countries to implement areas for improvement according to action-plans.

EWG still foresees that one country will take lead in organizing such an event but, with a more concrete steering and guidance from the Joint Committee, an event can be regarded as a more collective responsibility within the Joint Committee. The cycle also indicates when and what the Joint Committee might need to do at certain point in time.

Obviously, a three year cycle, as well as a new blend of less costly activities within an event, will reduce total costs for each country over a cycle period. A three year cycle also creates more opportunities for the creation of linkages with other forums and/or activities of relevance for the Barents cooperation. As an example, the Joint Committee has earlier

reflected on possible linkages to the ongoing Arctic cooperation. With some extra time between larger events, you also create some flexibility for other/shorter joint, or bilateral, activities which still goes in line with the Agreement and the Joint Manual.

It is of course also possible to keep a two year cycle, but then time for learning opportunities in each country will decrease and the possibility to reduce costs are also less obvious.

### 5.3 Example of a possible “Barents Rescue Event” in terms of target groups and objectives/activities

Based on the overall purpose as proposed above in the new Article 4 above, the following gives an example of how different target groups, with their respective possible objectives/activities, can be integrated into a Barents Rescue Event. This can then be transformed into an event were objectives can be met through different types of methods and formats, as well as a timeline where all targets groups does not need to be present throughout the full event.

Target group	Possible objectives/activities
Top-level decision makers (Ministerial group)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Informing the decision makers about the current situation in the field of rescue cooperation, trying to form joint understanding of the situation</li> <li>- Organizing informal/formal international discussions during the VIP program</li> <li>- Solving minor problems/making minor decisions needed for better international cooperation</li> <li>- Organizing preliminary discussions on serious problems/preparing serious decisions needed</li> <li>- Officially making/signing already prepared decisions/agreements</li> <li>- Making joint official statements for the media</li> </ul>
High-level decision makers (VIP group)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Informing the decision makers about the current situation in the field of rescue cooperation, trying to form joint understanding of the situation</li> <li>- Organizing informal/formal international discussions during the VIP program</li> <li>- Solving minor problems/making minor decisions needed for better international cooperation</li> <li>- Preparing the decisions/agreements for the Ministerial group to be discussed/made/signed</li> </ul>
Central authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Getting familiar with the concept of receiving international assistance (on a small/larger scale)</li> <li>- Organizing international discussions to find legal and administrative solutions to issues concerning HNS and border-crossing</li> <li>- Finding procedures/routines for national assets/staff to be deployed in the Barents region</li> <li>- Securing procedures for early warning, alarming routines etc between countries</li> <li>- Preparing common baselines/principles to be presented for</li> </ul>



	decisionmakers
Regional and municipal authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training in dealing with “bigger than usual” emergencies or emergencies with foreign citizens</li> <li>- Getting familiar with the concept of receiving international assistance (on a small/larger scale)</li> <li>- Training the coordination and cooperation skills and activities on different levels (inter-municipal, municipal-regional, inter-regional, between neighboring regions of different countries)</li> <li>- Testing existing agreements/traditional ways of international cooperation on the municipal/regional level</li> </ul>
Rescue services staff personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Getting familiar with the concept of multinational rescue operations</li> <li>- Getting more informed about foreign rescue practices and rescue equipment</li> <li>- Training to work with the foreign rescue personnel both on team-to-team and person-to-person level</li> <li>- Development of skills through best practices exchange</li> </ul>
Observers from rescue services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Getting familiar with the concept of multinational rescue operations</li> <li>- Getting more informed about foreign rescue practices and rescue equipment (during the seminars and exhibitions)</li> <li>- Getting familiar with the experience of rescue cooperation in the BEAR region</li> <li>- Using the possibility for networking</li> </ul>
Observers from non-rescue background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Getting familiar with the key aspects of conducting rescue operations in the Arctic</li> <li>- Getting familiar with the concept of multinational rescue operations</li> <li>- Getting familiar with the experience of rescue cooperation in the BEAR region</li> <li>- Using the possibility for networking</li> </ul>