



County Administrative
Board of Norrbotten

BARENTS REGIONAL COUNCIL AND BARENTS REGIONAL COMMITTEE

**Under the Chairmanship of the
County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, Sweden**

Chairmanship Program 2011-2013

“Our Barents – Our Future”

*Towards a civil, economical and environmental well-being in Barents –
securing a sustainable use of human and natural resources*



OUR BARENTS – OUR FUTURE
Towards a civil, economical and environmental well-being in Barents –securing a sustainable use of human and natural resources

As of October 2011, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten has the honour of chairing the Barents Regional Council. Back to back with the Norwegian national chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten will continue implementing the positive and timely initiatives undertaken by both Troms County Council and by Sweden during their 2009-2011 chairmanship on regional and national levels respectively.

As the chair of the Barents Regional Council, we have the privilege to suggest the agenda for the regional Barents cooperation for the coming two years. One of our main tasks will be to promote the strategic role that the Barents region could play in response to growing international needs in terms of natural and mineral resources. We believe that the timing is right for tackling this issue, which is essential for the durable development of our region.

A sustainable demand and supply of raw materials is a major on-going challenge in the world. It is being continually addressed on the EU level and is becoming more and more urgent. We do see a growing understanding in Europe of the strategic place that the Barents region could have in this regard and we can only welcome this encouraging development. It is furthermore very positive that the need to develop new railway and transport corridors as well as aviation connections in the Barents region is being recognised by the members of the European parliament. This increasing interest from all EU institutions is indeed a window of opportunity for us to ensure investments in infrastructure, education and research, thus securing further development of the Barents region. These investments should also allow developing a broader refinement sector in our region, in close cooperation with the universities, research centres and industry representatives.

The Barents region is not only extremely rich and indeed unique when it comes to natural resources. Our strength also lies with the people of the region, their knowledge, experience and rich historical and cultural heritage.

At the same time, there is no future without a healthy, well educated and motivated younger generation, willing to stay in the High North and to invest their energy and skills in the continued development of our region. It is thus the next priority of our chairmanship, to focus on the younger generation, inviting them to play a more active role in all Barents activities and ensuring a broader representation of youth on all levels of Barents cooperation.

During our chairmanship, the Barents cooperation will mark its 20th anniversary, which allows us to look into the future as well as to learn from past experiences. Our challenges include drafting the new Barents regional cooperation program, strengthening and capacity building of regional working groups, and creating better synergies between national and regional levels of cooperation. All these challenges are on our chairmanship agenda but we can only address them together. Therefore the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten is looking forward to a constructive dialogue and efficient continued collaboration with all our partners within the framework of Barents cooperation.

Per-Ola Eriksson
Governor of the County of Norrbotten

The priorities of our Chairmanship:

- **An emphasis on the younger generation**

Youth should definitely play a bigger role in Barents cooperation and representatives of the younger generation should be more actively involved in all Barents activities. Starting from creating stronger synergies between youth and cultural cooperation in Barents, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten will strive to ensure a broader representation of youth - young artists, students, specialists, entrepreneurs, etc. - on all levels of Barents cooperation.

- **Sustainable and eco-efficient management of natural resources**

It is the ambition of the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten Chairmanship to contribute to the strategic positioning of the Barents region within the EU as a key region to respond to the growing EU needs in terms of natural resources. This in turn should ensure investments in mining and refinement industries, infrastructure, education and research. It will also contribute to strengthening the image of the Barents region on the European arena, making it all more visible and valuable for our strategic partners.

- **Transport and infrastructure development**

Development of communications inside the Barents regions is a key factor to increased economic, scientific and cultural cross-boarder ties and to everyday people-to-people exchanges. With the active participation of the regional working group on transport and logistics, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten will continue lobbying for the adoption of a comprehensive Barents transport strategy that takes into account regional needs and realities and foresees further development of communications in the East-West direction. Particular attention will be paid to setting up regional transverse aviation and making border crossing smoother. A closer cooperation with the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics should be envisaged too.

- **Scientific and technological cooperation**

Sustainable and eco-efficient economic development is impossible without ongoing research and development of new technologies, for instance those enhancing energy efficiency. Therefore the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten will favour increased cooperation between the universities on the one hand and representatives of trade and industry on the other hand. Furthermore, strengthened cross-boarder cooperation and exchanges between universities remain of an utmost importance, and the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten will contribute to that too, as much as possible. Broader participation of young students and specialists in scientific and technological cooperation should be encouraged at all times.

- **Environmental challenges**

Ongoing climate change is a major concern for the whole Barents region. The threat it represents to traditional living cycles of indigenous peoples, ecosystem services, biodiversity and human health, as well as its inevitable negative effect on the economics, show that urgent joint action in this field is required. Thus, development of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures is necessary, as is the drafting of a comprehensive Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Region. These initiatives will receive the full support of the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten. Furthermore, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, recognizing the importance of clean drinking water in the Barents Region, will support the ongoing activities in the Subgroup on Water Issues on water resource management in the North West part of the Russian Federation. Also, the environmental “hot-

spots” exclusion process will receive all possible support from the regional chairmanship. Finally, the establishment of networks for nature protection in the Barents Region is of interest, and special attention should be given to joint cooperation between the regions to promote nature protection and sustainable tourism. All these joint efforts should, in the long run, contribute to establishing and maintaining environmental sustainable well-being in Barents - not only for the present - but also for the future generations.

- **Economic cooperation**

The County Administrative Board of Norrbotten will continue to explore the possibilities of broader cross-border cooperation and investments focusing on customers’ needs and market opportunities. The upcoming challenge for regional enterprises will be to increase their competitiveness in the light of the important investments that are underway in the Barents region. The regional working group on investments and economic cooperation will be encouraged to undertake initiatives in this direction and to provide support to regional companies. Contacts between young entrepreneurs from all Barents regions should be facilitated at all times, and business initiatives of the younger generation should be promoted and supported.

- **Cultural cooperation and creative industries**

The County Administrative Board of Norrbotten will continue promoting cultural cooperation on the regional level, including the existing network of creative industries, as to increase the impact of culture in the Barents region. Rich historical heritage, multicultural environment and at the same time common Barents identity makes our region even more attractive and worthwhile visiting. Through supporting the activities of the joint working groups on culture and on tourism, we would like to promote cultural tourism, especially among the representatives of the younger generation. Joint sports initiatives should also be welcomed. Furthermore, through a series of joint cultural events, we are going to contribute to a broad celebration of the 20th anniversary of signing of the Kirkenes Declaration that formally started the Barents cooperation.

- **Indigenous peoples**

The County Administrative Board of Norrbotten would like to establish a broader cooperation with the representatives of the working group of indigenous peoples in all areas of common concern. Furthermore, with the support of the regional working group on environment, the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten would like to continue tackling the issue of the indigenous peoples and the challenges posed to their traditional lifestyle by the climate change and industrial development. A closer collaboration with the Arctic Council on these issues should be envisaged and welcomed.

- **Information and promotion**

The County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, with the support of and in close cooperation with all its national and regional partners, will continue to promote the Barents region on all levels. In particular, the events organised as a preparation to and during the anniversary year of 2013 would contribute to this ongoing long-term activity. Furthermore, we would support the efforts undertaken by the national chairmanship to promote the Barents region on the EU level and internationally. Finally, we would further explore synergies, possibilities and opportunities of cooperation with the Arctic Council, the Council of Baltic Sea States and the Nordic Council of Ministers, namely in terms of implementation of joint projects.