

THE BARENTS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES SUMMIT

Online event

The Importance of Indigenous Peoples in the Barents Cooperation

Tuesday 8 June 2021, 10:00-15:00

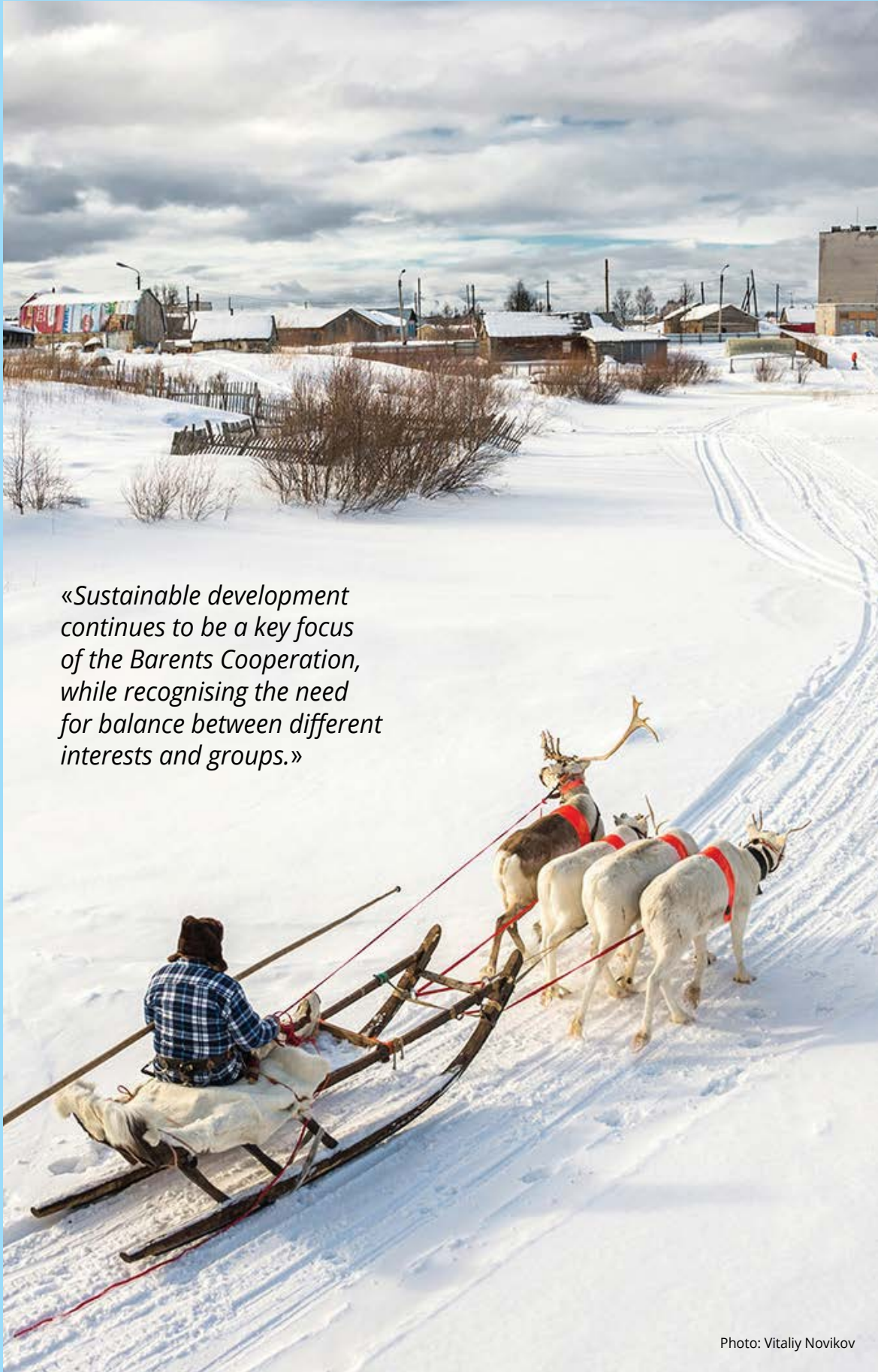


Photo: Oleg Yaromiy



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs





«Sustainable development continues to be a key focus of the Barents Cooperation, while recognising the need for balance between different interests and groups.»

Photo: Vitaliy Novikov

Summary

This report has been prepared by Dr Ingrid A. Medby, Oxford Brookes University, June 2021.

On 8 June 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, the Sámi Parliament of Norway, Västerbotten County, and the Barents Working Group of Indigenous Peoples organised the third biennial Barents Indigenous Peoples' Summit. The summit was hosted and live-streamed online due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The purpose of the summit was to contribute to dialogue between Indigenous peoples and state authorities in the Barents region, and to share knowledge and experiences for more sustainable development among Indigenous peoples. The title of this year's summit was "The importance of Indigenous peoples in the Barents Cooperation".

The pandemic has had profound effects on all aspects of daily lives, while also highlighting the need for cross-border collaboration and dialogue. This was emphasised by speakers, while recognising the particular challenges of Indigenous peoples in the Barents region. As cultural, familial, and economic ties cross state borders, the recently introduced restrictions have presented added difficulties in the north. However, many speakers also noted the opportunities that new technologies provide for sharing experiences and knowledge, including through virtual meeting-places.

During Norway's Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (2019-21), the three priority areas have been health, people-to-people contact, and knowledge. In particular the latter received attention during summit, with a focus on the role and importance of Indigenous languages.

The summit was structured in two parts: Part 1 saw remarks from the hosts, state and regional leaders, and Indigenous peoples' representatives, all reflecting on the 2021 summit's theme; Part 2's primary topic was Indigenous languages' current status, revitalisation, and futures in the Barents region. In addition, the event included performances and artistic contributions by Indigenous artists, and a greeting from the Riddu Riđđu international Indigenous festival on the occasion of its 30th anniversary.

In what follows, a brief summary of what was discussed in each part of the summit is provided. This is based on the live-streamed event [available here](#). The report is structured chronologically according to the event itself, with the full programme provided at the end and [available online](#).

Part I: 10.00–12.00

Part I key messages:

- The Barents Cooperation is as important as ever, not least in a challenging time of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has presented particular challenges for Indigenous peoples living across state boundaries. However, technological innovations have allowed the Cooperation to continue also during this period.
- The importance of Indigenous languages is widely recognised, as well as the challenges facing the learning, teaching, status, and materials of these. Positive work has taken place as part of the UN's Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019, and the upcoming UN Decade on Indigenous Languages in 2022-32 provides a continuation of this.
- Sustainable development continues to be a key focus of the Barents Cooperation, while recognising the need for balance between different interests and groups. In particular, sustainability and the "green shift" need to be balanced with Indigenous livelihoods and rights.
- While there are national and regional differences, many of the key issues facing Indigenous peoples in the Barents region are shared across boundaries. The need for strengthened dialogue and cooperation is therefore as important as ever, including the sharing of good practices and useful experiences. In particular ensuring the involvement of Indigenous youth in all aspects of the Barents Cooperation remains a priority.

Part 1 was opened by statements by the three hosts: Ine Eriksen Sørreide, Foreign Minister of Norway and current Chair of the Barents-Euro Arctic Council; Aili Keskitalo, President of the Sámi Parliament of Norway; and Helene Hellmark Knutsson, Governor of Västerbotten and current Chair of the Barents Regional Council.

Eriksen Sørreide commended the initiative of the summit by Russia in 2017, and welcomed everyone to this third summit online. Her remarks focused on five topics: (1) identity and Indigenous culture as a part of Barents; (2) the importance of listening to young people; (3) the importance of involvement and cross-border cooperation between Indigenous peoples, including on climate

change and learning from local knowledge; (4) the need for political will, strengthening cooperation and dialogue during the pandemic; and (5) the value of sharing knowledge and learning from each other, as has been a key priority during Norway's Chairmanship of the Barents-Euro Arctic Council.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs' remarks were followed by the President of the Sámi Parliament of Norway Aili Keskitalo's, who also focused on knowledge and knowledge-sharing. Reflecting on the significance of Indigenous knowledge of the seasons, she emphasised the importance of cross-border cooperation both among Indigenous peoples and with state authorities.



Photo: Norwegian Barents Secretariat

During the Covid-19 pandemic, this has proven even more challenging, and she called for further coordination on restrictions, regulations, and health-related information.

Finally, Helene Hellmark Knutsson, Governor of Västerbotten, remarked on the strength of the Barents Cooperation being the region's people. This also includes youth, whose participation remains a priority, as does gender equality. Reflecting on the developments since the 2010 Barents Indigenous Peoples Congress in Kirkenes, she saw an increased awareness of the role of Indigenous peoples among decision-makers and other key players.

The three hosts' welcomes were followed by a performance by Sámi artist Ronja Larsen, before the members the European Union (EU), Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Russia, and

Sweden each presented brief statements:

Michael Mann, Special Envoy for Arctic Matters for the EU, noted the increasing effects of climate change, and that The EU will be updating their Arctic Policy (to be completed by October). Also Finland, represented by State Secretary Malin Brännkärr of the Ministry of Justice, is preparing a new Arctic strategy. This focuses on the four key areas of climate change, inhabitants, Arctic expertise, infrastructure, and logistics – all of which need to respect the rights of Indigenous peoples. She also noted the first of its kind Truth and Reconciliation process that Finland will be undertaking with the Sámi people, and that they will be preparing for the next Barents Indigenous Peoples' Summit in 2023. From the Sámi Parliament of Finland, President Tuomas Aslak Juuso





Photo: Norwegian Barents Secretariat

noted the significant changes since the 2019 summit in Sweden with the pandemic hampering cooperation.

He continued to emphasise the importance of Indigenous peoples on topics of climate change, including recognising the potentially negative effects of mitigation efforts for Indigenous peoples.

Climate change was a key focus also for Jon Erlingur Jonasson, Director General of Iceland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As Iceland has just concluded their two-year chairmanship of the Arctic Council, he reflected on the value of closer synergies between different multilateral organisations, debates, and opportunities. He also commended achievements made, such as the greater inclusion of youth voices in the Barents Cooperation.

From Russia, Timur Tsybikov, Head of Division of the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs, also noted achievements of recent years both within Russia and the wider

Barents region. As Russia has just commenced their two-year chairmanship of the Arctic Council, they welcome further cooperation – recognising not least the importance of Indigenous languages, education, and health. His remarks were followed by those of Yuri Khantazeyskiy, Vice President of RAIPON (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North), who started by noting the significance of working with youth – “they are our future”. They also look forward to the activities and events of Russia's Arctic Council Chairmanship, and noted in particular the seriousness of climate change for Indigenous peoples.

From Sweden, Helene Öberg, State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, spoke about the prioritisation of climate and environmental policy issues in Sweden. As the Barents region warms at more than twice the average global rate, it remains a fact that environmental issues are often global in nature. This only underlines the necessity to work together and across national-regional levels. The President of the

Sámi Parliament of Sweden, Per-Olof Nutti, spoke next on a number of serious issues relating to climate change and mitigation efforts. He noted examples of racism towards Sámi people, including youth, online and in response to their voicing their concerns. As Indigenous peoples are often those most directly affected by climate change, it is of high importance to ensure that efforts to mitigate against it are not to the detriment of their lives and livelihoods. Too often “green” policies have a negative effect on Indigenous peoples. Finally, he noted how the pandemic has hit in Sweden, and ended by calling for increased support for Indigenous culture, entrepreneurs, and initiatives.

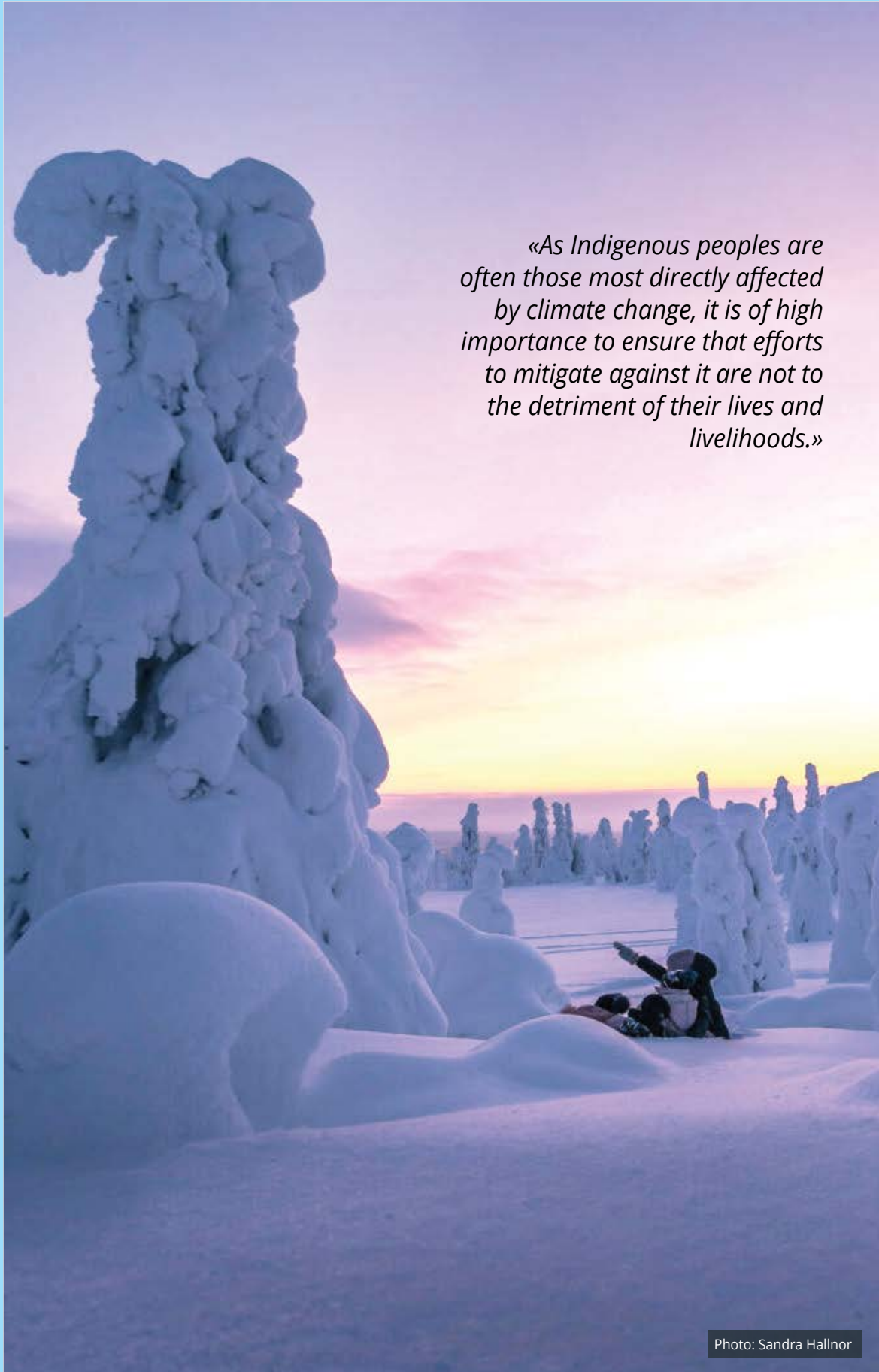
Following a number of comments about the importance of youth voices, Nikita Ageev of the Barents Regional Youth Council stressed the value of the people-to-people cooperation that lies at the heart of the Barents Cooperation – especially in this challenging year. A number of challenges as well as opportunities were identified for the future of the region, such as tourism, and in all cases the need for further cooperation, dialogue, and contact is clear.

The final section of Part 1 offered comments by regional political leaders: Valentina Zganich, Vice Governor of Nenets Autonomous Okrug in Russia;

Tomas Norvoll, Chair County Council of Nordland in Norway; and Mika Riipi, County Governor of Lapland in Finland:

Zganich commended the partnership the Barents Cooperation offers, and the role of youth in continued constructive interaction. Norvoll noted the increasing role and visibility of Sámi languages in Nordland County, and how this is strengthened in the run-up to Bodø taking on the role of European Capital of Culture in 2024. It is an aim that everyone should have learnt at least some Sámi words, and the upcoming Decade will continue this also beyond 2024. Riipi reflected on both shared challenges and the differences in the situation of Indigenous peoples and rights across the Barents countries – despite homelands crossing state borders. The next Barents Indigenous Peoples’ Summit will be held in Finland, and thus continue the focus on working together on common issues.

Finally, Part 1 was closed by the three hosts, who thanked participants for their insights and remarks. They all noted their inspiring nature, and Keskitalo noted the need to learn from good practices and examples. The Barents Cooperation is built on cross-border ties, and these continue to develop also in this challenging time.



«As Indigenous peoples are often those most directly affected by climate change, it is of high importance to ensure that efforts to mitigate against it are not to the detriment of their lives and livelihoods.»

Photo: Sandra Hallnor

PART II: 13.00–15.00

Part II key messages:

- Indigenous meeting-places are of key importance not only for political participation but also on cultural matters. The Indigenous festival Riddu Riđđu is one example of this, where identity and culture are celebrated and experiences shared. As noted also in the previous part of the summit, the ongoing pandemic has paused many initiatives – while others have also been able to adapt through new use of technology and virtual meeting spaces. Plans to continue and strengthen activities are already underway for after the pandemic.
- Indigenous languages are under threat globally and in the Barents region, necessitating particular focus and strengthening. This requires investments to facilitate teaching and learning training, materials, education, and resources.
- The UN Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-23 will likely provide a valuable opportunity for flagship projects and collaboration across and beyond the Barents region.
- Indigenous languages' revitalisation is important for identity and cultural heritage, as well as for the survival of knowledges embedded in them.

Part 2 saw a particular focus on Indigenous languages. It opened with a greeting from the Indigenous festival Riddu Riđđu, celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. While the pandemic means that it cannot welcome international visitors in 2021, Director Sandra Marja Best emphasised how they look forward to welcoming cross-border Indigenous festivalgoers in the near future. The greeting was followed by a brief video from the festival and a performance by Sámi artist Viktor Bomstad.

The first remarks centred on “how to secure a bright future – the situation for Indigenous peoples’ languages in the Barents region today”. First, the President of the Sámi Parliament of Norway Aili Keskitalo spoke again, focusing on the upcoming International Decade for Indigenous Peoples’ Languages. She not only reflected on the past and ancestral knowledges, but also

the importance of ensuring that Indigenous languages are not left behind in the “digital leap”.

Further, updates were offered on the current situation of the Kildin Sámi Language, presented by Roman Jakovlev; the Vepsian language, presented by Natalia Silakova; and the Nenets language, presented by Natalia Latysheva. While the situation of each differs – including the number of speakers – they all share the concern of developing teaching and learning resources. The final speaker, Lene Antonsen from Giellatekno at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway spoke specifically about the development of new Indigenous language technologies on which she and colleagues are working. In all cases, Indigenous language revitalisation will need a range of participants, including language-holders and technology-developers. And moreover,



Photo: Riddu Riddu

it will need investment and focus, such as incentives to allow people to study their own languages in diverse ways and locations.

These interventions were followed by further discussion of cross-border language cooperation in Sápmi by Lars Miguel Utsi from the Sámi Parliament of Sweden; and building on the previous discussion of the current situation, the future of Nenets, Kildin Sámi, and Vepsian languages. This provided an opportunity to share good practices and ideas, while also reflecting further on the particular challenges to language-acquisition and training. Finally, Anni Koivisto from the Sámi Parliament of Sweden spoke about visions for Indigenous peoples' languages in the Barents region, emphasising that languages are one key but not the only part

of Barents Indigenous cooperation. Many positive steps have been taken, but it remains crucial to ensure that ongoing plans are also followed through with action in years to come.

The moderators Lars Anders Baer (Barents Working Group of Indigenous Peoples) and Gøril Johansen (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway) summarised and closed the summit by noting again the important role of Indigenous peoples in the Barents Cooperation and region. Knowledge-sharing remains as important as ever, and while it is no substitute for meeting in person, technology has facilitated this and the possibility of the summit.



*«Indigenous languages
are under threat globally
and in the Barents region,
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focus and strengthening.»*



Photo: Dmitry Gornaev



Programme – Part I (10:00-12:00)

INTRODUCTIONS BY THE HOSTS (4 minutes each)

Ine Eriksen Søreide, Foreign Minister of Norway, Chair of the Barents-Euro Arctic Council
Aili Keskitalo, President of the Sámi Parliament of Norway
Helene Hellmark Knutsson, Governor of Västerbotten, Chair of the Barents Regional Council
Joik by Ronja Larsen, Sámi artist

COMMENTS BY DENMARK, THE EUROPEAN UNION, FINLAND, ICELAND, THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AND SWEDEN (4 minutes each)

Michael Mann, Special Envoy for Arctic Matters, EEAS/EU
Malin Brännkärr, State secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Finland
Tuomas Aslak Juuso, President of the Sámi Parliament of Finland
Jon Erlingur Jonasson, Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iceland
Timur Tsybikov, Head of Division, Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs, Russia
Yuriy Khantazeykiy, Vice President, Russian Association of Indigenous peoples of the North, Russia
Helene Öberg, State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sweden
Per-Olof Nutti, President of the Sámi Parliament of Sweden
Nikita Ageev, Indigenous representative, Barents Regional Youth Council, Russia

COMMENTS FROM REGIONAL POLITICAL LEADERS IN NORWAY, FINLAND AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Valentina Zganich, Vice Governor of Nenets Autonomous Okrug in Russia
Thomas Norvoll, Chair County Council of Nordland, Norway
Mika Riipi, County Governor of Lapland, Finland

CLOSING REMARKS FOR SESSION I BY THE HOSTS

Ine Eriksen Søreide, Foreign Minister of Norway, Chair of the Barents-Euro Arctic Council
Aili Keskitalo, President of the Sámi Parliament of Norway
Helene Hellmark Knutsson, Governor of Västerbotten, Chair of the Barents Regional Council

MODERATOR:

*Gøril Johansen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway,
Chair of the Barents Committee of Senior Officials*

The Summit features a mini exhibition by Norwegian artist Inger Blix Kvammen, Tundra Archives, photos taken in Nenets.



Programme – Part II (13:00-15:00)

GREETINGS FROM RIDDU RIÐÐU – LIFTING INDIGENUOS' VOICES AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS FOR 30 YEARS

Video by Riddu Riddu (2 min)

Joik by Sámi artist Viktor Bomstad (3 min)

HOW TO SECURE A BRIGHT FUTURE – THE SITUATION FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' LANGUAGES IN THE BARENTS REGION TODAY

- **The International Decade for Indigenous Peoples' Languages (10 mins)**
- *Aili Keskitalo, President of the Sámi Parliament of Norway*
- **The Situation of the Kildin Sámi Language Today (10 mins)**
- *Roman Jakovlev, Kildin Sámi musician*
- **The Situation of the Vepsian Language Today (10 mins)**
- *Natalia Silakova, Vepsian representative of WGIP*
- **The Situation of the Nenetsian Language Today (10 mins)**
- *Natalia Latysheva, member of the "Yasavey", Director of the House of Folk Art in the Nes village in Nenets Autonomous Okrug*
- **Language Technology and Indigenous Peoples' Languages (10 mins)**
- *Lene Antonsen, Giellatekno, The Arctic University of Norway (UiT)*

BREAK

PANEL DEBATE

- **Cross-border Language Cooperation in Sápmi (8 min)**
- *Lars Miguel Utsi, Sámi Parliament in Sweden*
- **The Future of Kildin Sámi Language (8 min)**
- *Roman Jakovlev*
- **The Future of Vepsian Language (8 min)**
- *Larisa Chirkova, Chair Vepsän Kultur Sebr*
- **Visions for Indigenous People's Languages in the Barents Region (8 min)**
- *Anni Koivisto, The Sámi Parliament of Finland*

MODERATOR:

Lars Anders Baer, Member of the Barents Working Group of Indigenous Peoples.

