



**TROMS** fylkeskommune  
**ROMSSA** fylkkasuožkan



## **Chair of the Barents Regional Council – Mrs. Pia Svendsgaard**

### **Opening speech in the EU Parliament – 2011-04-13**

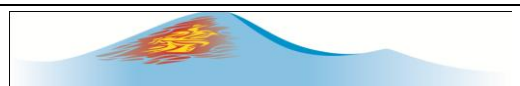
Dear Mrs. Birgit Schnieber-Jastram, other Members of the European Parliament and other EU institutions, the Barents Regional Council, the Barents Regional Committee, speakers, friends and colleagues.

My name is **Pia Svendsgaard**, and I am the chair of Troms County Government, and for this two year period chair of Barents Regional Council. It is an absolute honour for me to welcome you all to this seminar concerning the relationship between EU Arctic Policy, represented by the EU Arctic Forum and the Barents region, represented by the Barents Regional Council. I am very proud we have managed to join Europe and Barents this way! And I really want to thank Birgit for hosting this seminar.

I am looking forward to the presentations from our high level speakers and the following discussions. But first I have the pleasure to present the Barents region, an important part of the high north, Barents Regional Council and the structures of the Barents Cooperation in the High North. I will state that the Barents area should be an important part of all Arctic policies, but of course especially for Europe, that be on a national or multinational level, like the EU.

#### **The Barents Region**

The Barents Region consists of the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland and North West Russia. The area covers 1, 75 million square kilometres. Despite its richness in natural resources and it's beautiful scenery it is sparsely populated, with only about 6 million inhabitants. Most of the regions in the Barents are situated along the shoreline. Outside this shoreline we might discover a significant part of the global reserves oil and gas.



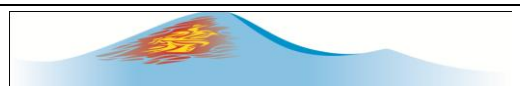
If we look back in history we find **old ties** between our peoples in the north. The relationship between the people of the northern parts of Finland, Sweden and Norway is connected to , among other things, immigration from northern Finland and Sweden to North Norway during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. For the indigenous people; the Sami national borders have been irrelevant, living as semi nomads. Another important historical contact in the Barents region has been the Pomor Trade. Between 1740 and 1917 the Pomor Trade was carried out between the people along the coast of Norway and settlers in North West Russia, trading grain product from Russia and fish from North Norway. North Norwegians depended on this trade and would have experienced a lot more hardship without it. The Russian revolution put an end to the Pomor Trade.

The **formally organised** Barents Cooperation was established in 1993, at intergovernmental level, with a Barents Euro-Arctic Council and at interregional level, with a Barents Regional Council. This formal multilevel governance structure is quite unique in its kind and I dare to say it should be an example also for others. The formal inclusion of the regional level in the BEAC cooperation is a good example on how the need for subsidiary can be implemented in formal structures of cross-border cooperation.

Overall interests within the cooperation have been to secure a peaceful and stable development of the region at large; encourage bilateral and multilateral relations; work for an environmentally sustainable economic and social development and to take care of the interests of the indigenous peoples.

From the beginning “**people-to-people cooperation**” has been our main perspective. This has brought the countries closer together, fostered a feeling of unity and laid ground for further collaboration. We now see increased business cooperation in the region, companies from Sweden, Finland and Norway establishing in Murmansk, Arkhangelsk and other Russian cities.

One main obstacle in this diverse cooperation has been the discussions on the **maritime delimitation** line between Norway and Russia in the Barents Sea. In April last year the two governments reached an agreement, after 40 years of negotiation.



The recommended solution divides the overall disputed area of about 175 000 square kilometres in two parts of approximately the same size. This agreement is adopted by the two National Parliaments and opens up new prospects for cooperation in the north on resources, trade and industry, employment opportunities and people-to-people cooperation across our common border.

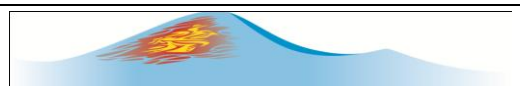
Smooth **border crossings** with Russia, both through technical improvements and simplified administrative procedures is another challenge that has to be solved, to be able to increase the cooperation and the economic activity along an important EU and Schengen border.

The work within the **regional Barents co-operation** is based on a joint Barents programme, laying out priority issues and strategies. Cross-border projects initiated by the Barents Regional Council are nationally **financed**. One of the conditions is that the projects have Russian partners. The last couple of years the cooperation has been strengthened through EU financial instruments. One important programme is the EU Neighbourhood Policy. For us, the ENPI, through the KolArctic and Karelia-programmes are important contributions to the realization of the Barents Programme. The Interreg- programme is off course another important tool.

### **Barents – Europe**

As you know some of the regions in the High North are also located within the European Union: The northern regions of Sweden and Finland through their national membership in EU and for Norwegian regions through the EEA agreement. At the same time Russia has a partnership at national level with the EU. This creates different natural intersections when it comes to cross-border cooperation, both at national and regional level. Within this framework we should work to **strengthen contact** and cooperation between the different political structures and make sure there are good conditions for collaboration between people and enterprises within the regions.

To raise the EUs awareness of the Barents area and the Barents Cooperation and strengthening the cooperation between us has been one of my priorities as chair of the Barents regional Council. I am therefore very pleased that this and other events and meetings are taking place more and more often.



EU's work towards an arctic policy may influence our region, and will have to be closely monitored. The same goes for the **Northern Dimension partnership**. The High North is a vulnerable area, where climate change and exploitation of its natural resources easily could have negative impacts. A sustainable utilization of resources and a sustainable approach to development in the High North can only succeed through a holistic strategy and shared agreements on the management of the area concerned.

With this in mind I am of the opinion that policies for the Arctic, or the high north, must be a integrated policy where all policy areas must be taken into concern. I will therefore encourage EU to continue this approach to your Arctic policy.

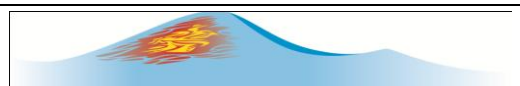
I will know say some words about the opportunities and challenges in the Barents regions and some of the political areas we think should be paid extra attention to.

### **NSPA**

The Barents Region is a **peripheral and sparsely** populated area, situated mainly along the shoreline. Long distances and lack of adequate infrastructure gives cross-border cooperation some particular challenges, both within the Barents co-operation itself and between Barents and other regions.

In this perspective the initiative to create the Brussels based network of the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas, referred to as **NSPA** is highly welcomed. . The network of NSPA includes the northernmost counties of Sweden, Finland and Norway. Its starting point is the NSPA area's many common features such as sparse population, harsh climate and long distances.

This area overlaps with the regions situated within the **Barents Region and the High North**, and the work of NSPA can strengthen the role of the Barents cooperation within the European Union. The network has emphasized the area as a strong, specific and promising and an important part of the EU. The network's objectives are to raise awareness of the region in the EU institutions, influence EU policy and provide a platform for best practise.



The NSPA and the Barents Region in total, is an area rich in **natural resources** – both raw material and energy - and this brings a unique opportunity to boost economic growth on several levels. This depends on policy both at national and international level which include the measures needed to meet the obstacles to development in such a region. A region with similarities to other European peripheral and sparsely populated areas, with perhaps similar challenges.

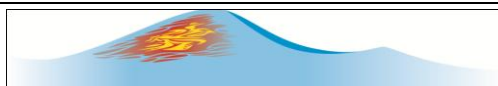
### **Processing industry**

The Barents area is extremely rich in raw materials, and the prestigious London based magazine Monocle has ranked the area as one of the global hotspots for investments this year. The newly discovered major oil field, Skrugard, in the Barents sea is a proof of this. This discovery also shows that the estimates that significant shares of the global oil and gas reserves are to be found in the shelf under the Barents Sea might be correct. This is not important only for Norway and Russia, but will also contribute to secure the supply of energy to the EU. Even though we all are striving for a greener development in the energy sector there will still be need for fossil fuels in all foreseeable future. Natural gas can also be reckoned as a greener alternative to other classical energy forms, like coal, in a transmission period to more sustainable energy recourses.

But today, large volumes of both **raw materials** and energy, in the form of petroleum and gas, are exported to markets outside the Barents region where they are processed and often end up back in the form of finished products.

Transports of large quantities of raw materials versus far less voluminous finished products are significantly less energy efficient and environmentally friendly. This gives us a strong incentive to promote increased processing and manufacturing of local processing.

By increasing the focus on **product development** and manufacturing in a larger extent than today, the region can be developed from being a net supplier of raw materials into a region where new industry is emerging and growing. Manufacturing Industries do also promote an increased demand for knowledge and expertise in which research, development and innovation are important elements.



This will lead to a more sustainable and inclusive growth. And by using the local embedded knowledge I am sure that also the innovative capacity will increase.

## **Infrastructure**

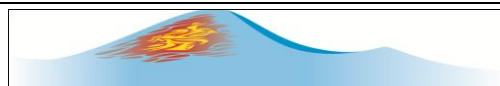
To be able to strengthen the processing industry, a well-functioning and well-developed **infrastructure** is a necessity to ensure that these projects and others can continue to generate growth in the region at large.

In such a context, it is important to seek sustainable solutions in a holistic perspective and not only as isolated bits and pieces. Such an approach has been taken by the EU with regards to the work on establishing an efficient **trans-European transport network** (TEN-T), which is a key element for competitiveness and employment in Europe. Transport infrastructure is fundamental for the mobility of people and goods and for the territorial cohesion of the European Union and its neighbouring regions.

As the maritime traffic in the Baltic Sea region continues to grow, there will be an ever increasing need for **alternative shipping options** and both the Russian and Norwegian ports in the north are good alternatives. Norway with its long coastline has a broad selection of good **harbours** with a huge development potential – a potential that is also relevant for the other countries in the Barents region. – the region will in many ways be bridging central Europe and the Arctic. You may be aware of the great Interreg North Sea Project called Northern Maritime Corridor, now StratMos, which is working on this particular issue.

A scenario with serious consequences is the melting of the **Polar Ice**. Still we should not forget that this scenario, if it is to happen, will open up new prospects as the Polar Ocean becomes increasingly accessible and crossable. This is linked to great commercial interests between numbers of different interests. This is a complicated issue, with a lot of different aspects, which I will not go into detail on now since we soon will hear a lot about that from Mr. Ruksha. However, increased shipping-traffic will create new possibilities and environmental and security-related challenges for the Barents region, which should be paid more attention to.

Another important aspect of Barents politics is securing a good and inclusive politic for the different groups of indigenous people in the Barents region. In my perspective



this should not only be about securing rights, but also, among other things, about securing the same standard of living, education, health services.

As you now have heard, the High North is brimming with potential and the possibilities are many, and so are the challenges. To have an overall view of things is also important. In order to secure that, we are working on developing our region into a competitive and powerful cluster in the north.

I hope that you all will find the presentations interesting and that many of you will take part in the discussions concerning the Barents area, the Barents cooperation and how this can be linked to EUs Arctic policy in general and the work of the EU Arctic forum in particular.

Thank you for the attention!

