

The Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC)

Annual report of the working group 2014

In 2014 The Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) has worked under the Finnish Presidency. The Finnish WGEC chairmanship has based its priorities on the priorities of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) 2013-2015: 1. Economic cooperation, including transport and logistics; 2. Environment and Climate Change and 3. Youth. The Finnish Chairmanship has three guiding principles in its work for the dynamic, inclusive and sustainable development of the Barents region: Coherence, Cooperation and Continuity.

The Finnish chairmanship of WGEC 2013-2015 will focus on possibilities for increased economic cooperation between the member states in the following areas:

- Cleantech Knowledge
- Sustainable Mineral Industry
- Cross-border Business Cooperation.

Under the priority *cleantech knowledge* focus is in the areas of energy efficiency, energy saving, water and waste water management; in the field of *sustainable mineral industry* economic, environmental and social sustainability, as well as question related to transport and logistics are highlighted. Finnish chairmanship will also promote cross-border business cooperation in the Barents region.

WGEC held its first meeting on 16 September 2014 in Helsinki. Representatives from Finland, Norway, Sweden, Russia and the IBS participated in the meeting. Major topics discussed were the results of Norwegian chairmanship; WGEC work and plans 2013-2015 and the Barents Forest Sector Task Force (BFSTF) state of play.

During 2014 the working group has confirmed the new mandate for Barents Forest Sector Network, including changing of the group's name (previously Barents Forest Sector Task Force). The cooperation in the forest sector is an administrative part of the WGEC.

A project by Spinverse Ltd, "Sustainable Arctic Mining Initiative" has been launched under the Finnish WGEC Chairmanship. The results of the project will be shared within the working group.

The Finnish Chairmanship has also commenced the preparations for the upcoming Cleantech Summit and Barents Industrial Partnership –meeting. The Cleantech Summit, which will include a special session in sustainable mineral industry in the Barents region, will be organized in Helsinki in September 2015. The Barents Industrial Partnership will be organized back-to-back with the BEAC Ministerial Meeting, in the City of Oulu, November 2015.