



Meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) Minutes

Time: 16 September 2014, 12.30-14:45
Venue: Ministry of Employment and Economy, Mikonkatu 4, Helsinki, Finland

The working group of Economic Cooperation held its first meeting under the Finnish Presidency 16th of September 2014 in Helsinki, Finland. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Petri Haapalainen from the Finnish Ministry for Employment and the Economy. The agenda and list of participants are attached.

1. Opening of the meeting

The chair opened the meeting at 12:30 and welcomed all the participants to the first meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation during the Finnish Chairmanship.

2. Main results of the Norwegian Chairmanship

Ms. Astrid Grindheim (Norway) gave the meeting an overview of the Norwegian WGEC Chairmanship 2011-2013.

During the Norwegian chairmanship of WGEC 2011-2013 there was a particular focus on new possibilities for increased economic cooperation between the member states in: 1) Maritime traffic in the Arctic Ocean, 2) Mineral Sector, 3) Cross-border business cooperation, and 4) Collaborate with other teams in the Barents Council and other regional structures.

The working group organized four meetings under the Norwegian Presidency. The main event was Barents Industrial Partnership (BIP) Conference, which took place in Troms, May 14th 2013. The key topic for the conference was cross-border business cooperation. The Norwegian chairmanship also commissioned a study on economic cooperation in the Barents Region from 2003-2012. Results and recommendations of the study were presented at the BIP Conference and also in the last WGEC meeting in October 2013 in Oslo.

3. Information from the Finnish BEAC Chairmanship

Finland took over the chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) from Norway on 29 October 2013. Director of the Unit for Regional Cooperation, Ms. Marja Liivala from the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs presented the guiding principles –*coherence, cooperation and continuity* –and priorities – *economic cooperation, environment and climate change and youth* – of the Finnish BEAC Chairmanship 2013-2015.

Economic cooperation will be intensified with special emphasis on promotion of sustainable mining and knowledge of clean technology. Well-functioning transport connections are crucial to the development of

the mining sector, local industries and tourism. Finland will continue the work on the Joint Barents Transport Plan aiming at a joint vision of the development needs of the Barents transport system.

Finland prioritizes environment and climate change as important cross-sectoral themes. Finland pays special attention to the environmental sustainability of all economic and industrial activities and to the implementation of the Barents Action Plan on Climate Change.

Youth cooperation aims at enhancing youth participation and social inclusion, access to education and employment. Promotion of the mobility of young people and the role of NGOs are of high importance.

Ms. Liivala also mentioned that an ad-hoc working group is preparing a study during the Finnish BEAC Chairmanships on the possibility of establishing a financial mechanism for the Barents region. The report and recommendations will be published in 2015.

4. Discussion of the work of the WGEC 2013-2015

The chair gave an overlook to the draft paper on priorities of the Finnish WGEC Chairmanship 2013-2015. Priorities of the working group are based on the overall principles of the Finnish BEAC Presidency.

Finland plans to focus on possibilities for increased economic cooperation between the member states in *cleantech knowledge, sustainable mineral industry, arctic maritime industry and traffic, and 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; in *arctic maritime industry* aim is to support safe shipping and create opportunities for maritime industry. Finnish chairmanship will also promote cross-border business cooperation in the Barents region.

Finland plans to organize three working group meetings during the Chairmanship. Also, a seminar on sustainable mining industry, cleantech and logistics sector is planned, together with relevant authorities and BEATA. Barents Industrial Partnership –conference will take place during the Finnish Chairmanship possibly in Northern Finland.

The working group commented the Finnish draft proposal. Mr. Sergey Goncharenko (Russia) called for more concrete activities and results – what will the WGEC do under the chosen priorities during the Finnish Presidency. For example to priority arctic maritime industry and traffic is very broad. Ms. Astrid Grindheim (Norway) commented that focusing to 2-3 priorities could be fruitful. The chair noted that the paper will be drafted and priorities further and more concretely defined. After this the paper will be distributed to the working group for commenting. The finalized priority paper will be posted on the BEAC Secretariat's website.

5. State of play of the Barents Forest Sector Task Force

The acting chair of the Barents Forest Sector Task Force, Mr. Tatu Tornainen from the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry also gave the meeting an update on the state of play of the task force. The goal has been to reorganize the work of the task force, link the forest sector activities to other relevant BEAC activities and foster local actors' cooperation in the Barents region. The task force is in the process of revising its mandate and changing its name to "Barents Forest Sector Network" – the decision is waiting to

be approved by all the member countries. An idea of the Forest Sector Forum organized by the Forest Sector Network was presented. The Forum is planned to be organized in 2015 in Joensuu, Finland.

The working group discussed forest sector cooperation in the Barents region, the mandate of the Barents Forest Sector Task Force and possibilities to organize a Forest Sector Forum for the Barents region.

6. AOB

No any other business

7. Next meeting

The next meeting of the working group will be organized in April/May 2015.

8. Closing of the meeting

The chair closed the meeting at 14.45 and thanked the participants for active and constructive discussion.