



20 February 2018

Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation

Minutes of the meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC), 20th of February 2018

Welcome and introduction

The Chair, Mr Tomas Dahlman welcomed the participants and invited them to make a round of presentations. Since no additional agenda points were suggested, the WGEC adopted the draft agenda.

The Chair invited the former Chair, Mr Usubov, to summarize the chairmanship of the Russian Federation. Mr Usubov pointed out the fact that only one out of three meetings was held during the two-year period due to difficulties in reaching quorum. Some of the messages from the Russian chairmanship were to a) make full use of the interaction possibilities of the group, b) find synergies between national and regional level by for instance including representatives from national working groups at meetings of regional working groups– and vice versa, c) make use of the other groups in the Barents cooperation (environment, transport, tourism etc) and their relevance to economic cooperation. Mr Usubov expressed his hopes that the Swedish Chairmanship would take these suggestions on board. Mr Usubov also informed that the annual report had been finalized and it was distributed. Finally, Mr Usubov urged the Swedish Chair to be very concrete in the proposals.

The Chair welcomed the proposals from Mr Usubov and agreed that the proposed area of work – Bio economy – was wide, but that suggestions were welcomed on how to be more specific.

Presentation of the Swedish chairmanship of the Barents Council and the WGEC 2017-2019

Ms Elinor Blomberg, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, introduced the priorities of the Swedish chairmanship of the Barents Council (for details see ppt).

The Chair informed the WGEC on the plans to hold a meeting in Haparanda in June where the work of the WGEC would be taken forward. He also informed about the plans to have bio-economy as a theme for the chairmanship.

Innovating bio-economy; the project TC4F

Ms Eva Johansson from The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences made a presentation where she gave an overview of bio-economy in general and presented the TC4F-project specifically (for details see ppt)

Overview of bio-economy initiatives of relevance for the Barents Region

Ms Marija Milivojevic, Swedish Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, gave a brief overview of multilateral bio-economy initiatives that could be of relevance for the Barents collaboration (for details see ppt).

Discussion on the way forward in promoting bio-economy in the Barents Region, including preparations of the WGEC-meeting in Haparanda, Norrbotten on the 26 of June, 2018

Ms Milivojevic presented the Concept paper that was sent to the WGEC in advance as a basis for discussion.

The WGEC agreed that the idea of having bio-economy as a theme was a good proposal, however, it was pointed out that this was a wide theme and needed to be specified and the proposed activities should be concrete.

Ms Tuulia Väliheikki, Finland, enquired what type of experts the Chair envisioned for the proposed task force. Mr Usubov, RU also enquired who should be invited to Haparanda in this regard?

The Barents Secretariat proposed that the other groups of the Barents Cooperation (forestry, environment, education and research) could present

how their work could feed into the work of the WGEC. The Barents Secretariat will circulate the inquiry of cooperation to other working groups.

Ms Johansson, SLU, suggested that finding the missing links in the chain (from the type of biomass to industry) would be useful. Ms Johansson also informed the group that there could be scope for increased collaboration between universities in the region with regard to research on bio-economy.

Ms Vibeke Hagelsteen, Norway, pointed out that forests are not the only areas of interest and that for Norway, blue economy is much more in focus.

Staffan Norin, BFSN, suggested that an overview of different sectors - and where you get the most from your investments - could be useful as well as to identify interactions between sectors.

Mr Usubov, RU pointed to the fact that it was important to be aware of the terminology which could differ. In RU the terminology circles around green economy whereas in EU it is bio-economy. It is also a matter of narrowing down the topics so that the correct ministry is consulted. Additionally, Mr Usubov mentioned that bio-economy is a part of a wider program in Russia. Best practices and the use of experts were from all countries highlighted as important to move the work forward.

Ms Väliheikki, FI, pointed out that bio-economy is an important part of regional development.

The Chair, Mr Dahlman thanked the group for the discussion and agreed more work needed to be done in time for the Haparanda meeting. He suggested that written comments could be sent in and that the deadline for this would be communicated via e-mail.