

## **BEAC Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC)**

(2015 Annual Report of activities)

In 2015 the BEAC Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) worked under the guidance of the Finnish Chairmanship-in-Office, which had been developing the priorities envisaged by Finnish Chairmanship in BEAC for the period 2013-2015. Among these priorities were: environment and climate change, economic cooperation including logistics and transport, etc.

During the Finnish Chairmanship the BEAC Working Group on Economic Cooperation has focused on the following areas:

### 1. Cleantech knowledge

As a result of increased economic activity in the Barents region the environment is subjected to greater strains. The Finnish Chairmanship intended to promote environmental sustainability through strengthening cleantech knowledge. While offering solutions for environmental challenges, cleantech knowledge may also improve “competitiveness of industries and services”.

The “Cleantech Innovations in Minerals Production” Conference was held in Helsinki on September 10, 2015. The conference discussed challenges in the Barents and Arctic area and the opportunities the clean technologies provide for sustainable minerals sector. The topics included resources and mining in the Barents and Arctic regions, adaptation to climate change and sustainable innovations. According to the information provided by the Finnish Chairmanship of the BEAC Working Group on Economic Cooperation there were 220 participants in this conference.

### 2. Sustainable mineral industry

The Finnish Chairmanship paid attention to the sustainable mineral industry proceeding from the fact that this area of cooperation offers major opportunities for economic activity and livelihood in the Barents region.

The project “Finnish-Russian Arctic Mining Initiative” was carried out by Spinverse Ltd. as part of the Finnish WGEC Chairmanship and the Finnish Green Mining Programme for 2011-2016. The project was funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Its goal is to create sub-clusters of companies, research organizations and other actors to offer a better service to the customer. The project identified key needs for research and innovation activities concerning

the mines in the North-Western Russia. Three priority areas were determined: 1. mine closure, 2. water balance, 3. process optimization.

### 3. Cross-border business cooperation

During the Finnish Presidency of the BEAC Working Group on Economic Cooperation initiatives for cross-border business cooperation and people-to-people contacts have been promoted.

One of the key events in this regard was the Barents Industrial Partnership Conference (BIP) held on October 14-15, 2015, in Oulu, Finland.

The Conference discussed several principal topics:

1. Arctic ICT and possibilities of digitalization;
2. Barents Tourism;
3. Prospects for financing in the Barents Area.

Cross-border business cooperation and small and medium size enterprises were a cross-cutting theme with the view that a good share of the companies operating in the ICT and tourism sectors in the Barents area are SMEs.

The Finnish Chairmanship highlighted sectors that bring livelihood and jobs to the region.

The Finnish WGEC Chairmanship also supported cooperation in the forest sector. The Barents Forest Sector Network (the former Barents Forestry Task Force) continued to be the part of the WGEC.

The Barents Forest Forum was organized in Joensuu, Finland on September 17-18, 2015. The Forum focused on the role of forest-based bio-economy in the Northern Europe, in particular wood construction, and on forest-based energy as drivers for sustainable development.

In 2015 three Meetings of the WGEC were convened:

- 1) May 12, 2015, Helsinki;
- 2) September 11, 2015, Helsinki;
- 3) October 14-15, 2015, Oulu (back-to-back with the abovementioned Barents Industrial Partnership Conference).