



**JOINT STATEMENT
OF THE ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS OF THE BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC
COUNCIL**

Kirkenes 21 August, 2001

The Environment Ministers of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council convened their Fifth Meeting in Kirkenes, Norway, 20-21 August, 2001, under the Norwegian chairmanship.

Ministers, the Sami President and representatives from the Member States (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, The Russian Federation and Sweden) participated in the Session, which was also attended by the European Commission together with:

Representatives from the Observer States (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America),

County and municipal political leaders, representatives of the regional authorities and of the Barents Regional Council and secretariats and the indigenous peoples of the region,

Representatives of the Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Nordic Environmental Finance Corporation (NEFCO) and UNEP/Grid Arendal.

The Council recalled the commitments stated in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council Environmental Action Programme adopted in Bodø in 1994, and the Declaration of the Environment Ministers adopted in Umeå in 1999.

The Council reaffirmed its strong commitment to further promote Barents co-operation in the field of environment and to cross-sectoral co-operation and agreed that the general aims and priorities in prior declarations are still valid as objectives and guidelines for the environmental co-operation in the Barents Region.

The Council stressed the importance of the work of the Regional Council. The Council encouraged the Governments to include the Barents perspective in their national preparations prior to the World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002.

The Council encouraged further co-operation with other subsidiary bodies of BEAC, especially on issues related to energy, forest, health and youth. It also encouraged co-operation with other regional bodies such as the Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Nordic Council of Ministers and with the European Union.

The Council stressed the need to strengthen implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements to safeguard the environment in the Barents Region, such as the UNEP

Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Kyoto Protocol and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Council welcomed the Report on the follow-up of the Environmental Action Programme under the Norwegian chairmanship and gave the following guidance:

1. The Council stressed that modernisation and reconstruction of major point sources of industrial pollution is one of the most important keys to a satisfactory future state of the environment and health conditions of the population in the region. The Council strongly underlined the need for improvements in the economic and legal framework to create sufficiently predictable and favourable investment conditions.
2. The Council noted with satisfaction the recent developments with regard to the Pechenga Nickel Mining and Smelting Combine, and expressed its satisfaction with the fact that the negotiations on modernisation and financing were now finished, and that the implementation of the modernisation project is scheduled to start in 2001. The Council underlined the importance of establishing a monitoring programme for the project.
3. The Council noted that significant results have been achieved through the Cleaner Production Programmes. Further dissemination of Cleaner Production Programmes in Northwest-Russia and the strengthening of co-operation between the Energy Efficiency Centres and the Cleaner Production Centres were encouraged.
4. The Council stressed the necessity to build on available financial instruments, such as NEFCO and to establish an Investment Financing Facility for Small and Medium Sized Environmental and Cleaner Production Projects in Russia and further encourage co-ordinated efforts in different funding facilities and financial institutions.
5. The Council supported the project on Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) under the Arctic Council to increase the knowledge of vulnerability due to climate change in the Arctic, including major parts of the Barents Region.
6. The Council supported closer co-operation between the Barents Council's working groups on Environment and Energy in the climate change and energy field to develop common activities and programmes to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. The Council supported the Joint Nordic Russian Initiative on Bioenergy and underlined the need for co-operation with relevant fora under the Council of Baltic Sea States and the Nordic Council of Ministers, taking into account other initiatives and experiences in this field. The Council underlined especially the need for sustainable energy systems, where environmental impacts are taken into account. The Council encouraged the working groups on Environment and Energy to consider the possibility to establish a Joint Task Force on Bioenergy and Joint Implementation or other forms of co-operation.
7. The Council welcomed the work of the International Contact Forum on Habitat Conservation in the Barents Region and stressed the importance to continue the co-operation of the network on nature protection and conservation of biodiversity, including establishment and management of protected areas. The Council underlined that information and awareness raising, environmental education and ecological tourism are important elements of this co-operation to achieve sustainable use of the protected areas.

8. The Council encouraged co-operation with the European Commission on specific projects for the follow-up of the Action Plan for the Northern Dimension in the External and Cross-Border Policies 2000-2003 of the European Union.

9. Specific attention should be given to the proposal to establish a “ Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership” between International Financial Institutions and the EU programmes and instruments. This will contribute to increasing the financing possibilities of high priority environmental, nuclear safety and nuclear waste management projects in the Northern Dimension Area. The Council noted the full report on the Northern Dimension policies to the Göteborg European Council in June 2001, and welcomed the European Commission’s participation in the last meeting of the Arctic Council, including the attention to Arctic (the so-called Arctic Window) within the Northern Dimension Area.

10. The Council took note of the Forest Sector Programme for the Northern Dimension, which was presented by the BEAC to the Second Foreign Ministers’ Conference on the Northern Dimension in Luxembourg in April, 2001. The Council underlined that sustainable forest management is a prerequisite to the development of an economically, socially and environmentally sound forest-based business activity and livelihood at the local level. The Council stressed the importance of sustainable use of other natural resources of the taiga zone, as well, including e.g. sustainable management of rivers and reindeer herding areas.

11. The Council stressed the importance of reaching an agreement on the multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme for Russia (MNEPR) as a prerequisite for enhanced participation by EU and other donors in the implementation of more extensive projects directly addressing problems related to the management of spent fuel and radioactive waste in North West Russia.

12. The Council further underlined the need for substantial reductions of the discharges of Technetium 99, in line with the OSPAR Convention. The Council welcomed the goals adopted by OSPAR to prevent pollution of the maritime area from ionising radiation. The Council expressed its satisfaction with the recent decision by OSPAR that the current review of authorisations for discharges or releases of radioactive substances from nuclear reprocessing facilities shall be completed as a matter of urgency.

13. The Council also noted with satisfaction that the up-graded facility for treatment of liquid radioactive waste from the Northern nuclear fleet in Murmansk is now ready for test operation and that this will enable Russia to accept the amendments to the London Convention banning ocean dumping of radioactive waste.

14. The Council underlined the need to ensure environmentally safe oil and gas activities and shipping transport and to strengthen further co-operation to protect the vast marine resources and land and coastal areas from future pollution. The Council supports the need for strengthening regional and international co-operation with regard to standards of ships and harbours and development of early warning procedures as well as to ensure that effective liability mechanisms are in place with regard to transport of petroleum and other substances that could cause a threat to the environment. The Council also stressed the need to build up capacity for oil contingency planning and measures to protect the marine environment of the Barents Sea.

15. The Council supported the co-operation on cultural heritage such as the Solovetsky Archipelago with the Monastery, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Council gave special recognition to the work being done to assist the development of the local community, both with regard to living conditions and as to the stimulation of local activities.

16. The Council underlined the importance of people-to-people co-operation to promote environmental commitment. Special attention should be given to the municipality-to-municipality co-operation to stimulate local and regional actions within the framework of Local Agenda 21 with networks of twinned local communities, youth organisations, NGOs and indigenous peoples in the Barents region.

17. The Council stressed the importance of several on-going local projects, including management of waste, sewage and drinking water quality and supply and other health related projects as well as exchange of students.

18. The Council noted the ongoing efforts to establish a network and projects between indigenous peoples and to strengthen the historic and cultural identity of the peoples in the Barents Region and the need to stimulate this further through seminars and projects. The vitalisation of the East Sami culture serves as an example of a successful project. The Council noted the aim to fulfil the objectives in Chapter 26 of Agenda 21 regarding the role of the indigenous peoples in the Barents region.

Finally, the Council reconfirmed the mandate of the Working Group on Environment and requested the working group to report on their work to the next Barents Environment Ministers' meeting.

The Council was pleased to accept the offer by Sweden to assume the chairmanship of the Working Group on Environment. Under the chairmanship of Sweden the Group will follow-up further on the above mentioned issues and develop a work programme with an aim also to contribute to the follow-up of the EU's Action Plan for the Northern Dimension and provide input for further development of the European-Russian Partnership.