



**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE BARENTS REGIONAL COUNCIL
AT THE BEAC 13TH SESSION
11 October 2011, Kiruna**

1. The Members of the Barents Regional Council (BRC) met in Kiruna on October 11, 2011, for the 4th meeting under the chairmanship of the County Council of Troms.

2. The BRC reaffirms the validity of the Agreement from the Statutory Meeting of the BRC held in Kirkenes on January 11, 1993.

3. The BRC reaffirms the value of the priorities of Troms Chairmanship with an articulate focus on people-to-people cooperation, the indigenous peoples, transport and logistics, culture, economic sustainable development, the strengthening of political cross-border cooperation, and the promotion of the Barents Region externally – all being crucial steps in the implementation of the *Barents Program 2009-2013*, adopted in November 2008.

4. The BRC emphasizes the unique features of the regional cooperation across national borders within the Barents Region setting a foundation for jointly tackling common challenges and developing common assets, and for seeking sustainable solutions for living, working, travelling and running businesses in the Barents Region.

Sustainable growth

5. The abundance of natural resources is recognized globally as one of the unique features of the Barents Region. The BRC underlines the need for urgent actions transferring the Barents Region into a net-exporter of sustainably processed and refined raw materials returning profits to the Region. The BRC recognizes investments, research, and development in products and manufacturing as key-issues in this respect.

6. The BRC stresses the need for continuous facilitation and simplification of border crossing procedures and welcomes local traffic agreements as measures taken towards visa-free travel.

7. The BRC welcomes the initiative to reactivate the Regional Working Group on Economic Cooperation and Investments and especially recognizes its role in stimulation cross-border business and entrepreneurship.

8. The BRC encourages regional participation in the Joint Working Group of Tourism in order to develop the tourism industry in the Region increasing revenues and diversification in local employment opportunities.

9. The BRC emphasizes the work on environmental protection and welcomes the drafting of recommendations for climate change-related actions in the Barents Region.

10. The BRC recognizes the crucial role of the regions in taking action as a prerequisite for a speedy exclusion of the Barents Environmental Hot Spots and welcomes the launch of the *Hot Spot Information System* on www.beac.st.

11. The BRC stresses the importance of the cooperation on environmental issues in improving the quality of potable water, promoting clean production and sound consumption, the exclusion of the Hot Spots and biological diversity and acknowledges the importance and the leading role of the Regional Working Group on Environment in these matters. Furthermore, the BRC invites all the regions to actively participate in the activities of the Regional Working Group on Environment.

12. The BRC welcomes the 10th Barents Ministerial Meeting on Environment to be held on November 8-9, 2011, and emphasizes the need to secure regional influence in order for the ministers to take the regional perspectives on responsible and green growth into consideration.

13. The BRC emphasizes the importance of improving energy efficiency and encourages regional participation in the Energy Joint Working Group.

Human resources, research and development

14. The BRC stresses that emerging and growing industries in extraction and processing, as well as new business opportunities in the service sector development, increase the demand for expertise, investments, research and innovation. The BRC acknowledges these needs and aims at meeting these ends in a concerted action. The BRC underlines that the structures provided by the Barents Cooperation as a whole are useful arenas for this purpose. Among others, the BRC welcomes the Joint Working Group on Education and Research in this respect, and encourages strengthened relations between institutions within education, research, and businesses to further develop cross-border ties in research and development.

15. The BRC stresses the importance of the Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues for active cooperation in the fields of Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS prevention and Children and Youth at Risk to meet modern demands on public service sectors.

16. The BRC encourages the responsible authorities to fulfill the obligation to have gained full control of the spread of tuberculosis in the Barents Region by the end of 2013 as stated in the *2003 Kirkenes Declaration of Prime Ministers*.

17. The BRC recognizes the role of a broad cultural cooperation as an integral part of the regional development.

18. The BRC welcomes the work of Northern Dimension Partnership for Culture to develop financial mechanisms for cultural projects.

19. The BRC welcomes the merging of the regional and national working groups on youth and recognizes the Barents Regional Youth Council for its practically oriented work in strengthening the youth cooperation, empowering young people to actively participate in shaping the Barents Region and the society in which they live. The BRC especially underlines the importance of these processes in the light of the significant demographic challenges of the Region.

Indigenous peoples

20. The BRC underlines the importance of the *Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region 2009-2012*, as a tool for development of indigenous peoples' communities and societies in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

21. The BRC welcomes the establishment of the *Barents Indigenous Peoples Congress*.

22. The BRC underlines the importance of participation of representatives of the indigenous peoples, meaning individual representatives for Nenets, Saami and Veps, in BEAC and BRC meetings without formal invitation.

23. The BRC emphasizes the important role of the project Indigenous Entrepreneurship – *Indigee* – for showing positive results in supporting the development of businesses, as well as for setting a multilateral example concerning participation, funding and management.

Transport and infrastructure

24. The BRC stresses that a well-functioning and well-developed transportation infrastructure, both in the North-South and the East-West directions consisting of railroads, roads and air traffic, is the common denominator in securing continuous growth in the Barents Region. The ever increasing need for shipping options requires on-land transport in order to connect satisfactory with global markets and networks. In addition, the future opening of the Northern Sea Route will transform the Barents Region into a gateway for transport and logistics operations serving not only the Barents Region but also global markets by offering significant cuts in transport distances. A well developed infrastructure in the region is also the very key in order for the new opportunities in logistics solutions between Europe and the Arctic. Furthermore, investments in infrastructure are absolutely crucial to the development of sustainable extraction and processing of the abundant natural resources in the Barents Region creating added value for the whole of Europe.

25. Seeking sustainable solutions, the BRC emphasizes that the development of multimodal transport in and to the Barents Region is prioritized by the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics, and welcomes the initiative of the Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics to develop a Barents *Strategy for Transport and Logistics* supporting the development of a multimodal infrastructure in the Region.

Political influence and future cooperation

26. The BRC welcomes and supports the efforts of the current BRC, and BEAC Chairmanships aiming at increased cross-border cooperation as well as their sustainable dialogue to coordinate national and regional levels of the Barents Cooperation.

27. The BRC welcomes the efforts of the Troms Chairmanship to develop the political strength and the political influence of the BRC in promoting the Barents Region on national and international levels. The BRC will continue to prioritize and develop this activity.

28. The BRC particularly welcomes the efforts of Troms Chairmanship to influence the EU-Arctic Strategy through a direct dialogue formally as well as informally especially with the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the EU-Arctic Forum, The BRC will continue to prioritize and develop this activity.

29. The BRC welcomes the efforts of the Troms Chairmanship to promote the Barents Region within the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas and Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions and recognizes the role of these networks. In this respect as well as in the cooperation with the EU institutions, the BRC acknowledges the achievements of the North Norway European Office, and recommends the incoming Chairmanship of Norrbotten to continue this modus operandi through its Swedish counterpart in Brussels; the North Sweden European Office.

30. The BRC supports the ongoing efforts of the Arctic Center of Lapland University in Rovaniemi, to be appointed as the *EU Arctic Information Centre* as it would contribute to communications and transfer of information both between the Barents regional stakeholders and with the EU and thus improve the base on which future EU decisions concerning the High North are being made.

31. The BRC welcomes the efforts of coordination and finding synergies between the Four Councils of the North, supports the establishment of the permanent Secretariat of the Arctic Council, and the efforts of the Troms Chairmanship to obtain observer status for the BRC in the Arctic Council.

32. The BRC underlines that the Barents Region plays a significant and integral role in the Northern Dimension.

33. The BRC recognizes the need to cooperate on fundraising for the projects and activities in the Barents Region, and in this respect welcomes the Swedish secondment of a Senior Funding Adviser to the International Barents Secretariat.

34. The BRC recognizes the important role of the international financial instruments and notes with satisfaction that the ENPI Kolarctic and Karelia Programs are under implementation. The Programs strongly support concrete regional cooperation on equal basis and enhance the goals of the Barents Cooperation in its various activities.

35. In the Joint Statement of the 12th BEAC Session, the BRC called for bringing together Ministers of the Barents Member Countries within various sectors. The BRC therefore welcomes the First Meeting of the Ministers of Competitiveness, in 2010, and stresses that the development along these lines should continue, establishing closer ties also on the highest national levels improving potentials for bringing down barriers that are to the detriment of sustainable growth in the Barents Region.

36. The BRC welcomes the *Maritime Delimitation Agreement* between Norway and Russia and recognizes its potential for strengthening the cooperation in the North on a wide basis.

37. The BRC welcomes the increasing strength of the parliamentary dimension of the Barents Cooperation and supports the provisions of the *Resolution of the 5th Barents Parliamentary Conference* held in Luleå, May, 2011.

38. The BRC endorses the 20th anniversary of the Barents Cooperation to be celebrated in 2013 by welcoming a second Barents Prime Ministerial Meeting and a Kirkenes Declaration version 2 reflecting the current geopolitical situation in the Barents Region as compared to 1993, and setting out clear priorities for future sustainable growth.

39. The BRC expresses its gratitude to the outgoing BEAC Chair, the Kingdom of Sweden, and to the outgoing Chair of the BRC, the Region of Troms, Norway, as well as to all other parties for their excellent work.

40. The BRC welcomes the incoming Chair of the BEAC, the Kingdom of Norway, and of the BRC, the Region of Norrbotten, Sweden. The BRC welcomes the priorities of the Chairs and looks forward to mutual support between the Chairmanships of the two Councils.