

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE BARENTS REGIONAL COUNCIL

On the occasion of the BEAC Ministerial meeting and the EU Arctic Forum

3 October 2019, Umeå, Sweden

The Barents Regional Council (BRC) convened on 2 October 2019 in Umeå, Sweden under the Chairmanship of Finnmark County. In its meeting the BRC:

- Recalled the statement by the Barents Regional Council on 3 June 2013 in Kirkenes,
- Reiterated our strong resolve in developing the Barents region as a unique Arctic region based on sustainability and taking into account the indigenous peoples,
- Referred to resolutions agreed upon during Barents Regional Council meetings in the period 2017 to 2019,
- Put forward the following proposals to be considered by the foreign ministers of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council:

Financial support for Working Groups

The Barents Regional Council strongly believes that improved access to funding for Working Groups would contribute to vitalizing the overall work of the Barents Co-operation. It therefore reiterates its statement from June 2013, and asks the Barents Euro-Arctic Council to consider a national funding for low-threshold project applications from the Working Groups. Such a mechanism would ensure operationalization and continuity of the co-operation in all sectors where it has been established. The regional level is currently providing financing to the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) and the Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Co-operation. The Norwegian Barents Secretariat has provided administrative assistance to both BRYC and the Working Group and has in addition played a pivotal role in re-invigorating the Regional Working Group on Investment and Economic Cooperation as its Chair.

The funding could be made available through the International Barents Secretariat. To ensure a strong regional commitment, funding decisions should be made by the Barents Regional Council. Proposals for decision-making should be prepared by the Barents Regional Committee based on applications from the Working Groups. These applications are to be sent to the International Barents Secretariat. The participation of CSO in Regional Committee and Council meetings and the participation of the Chair of the Regional Committee in the CSO meetings will ensure appropriate co-ordination between the national and regional level. Administrative costs related to the evaluation of project applications are to be covered by the member regions.

Cross border mobility

The Council believes that there is a need to make the Barents region a visa-free area for residents of this region. The visa-free regime in the Barents region will also strengthen the Barents identity, affiliation and commitment among the Barents population. It will facilitate labor and education mobility and all kinds of contacts between people living in the Barents region. The Council welcomes steps aimed at easing the visa regime such as the introduction of e-visas. The Council therefore encourages relevant authorities to continue exploring solutions for a visa-free regime in the Barents region.

Environment protection and climate change

The Council emphasizes that the Barents Region is a place of increased human activity and greater economic importance. In addition, the Council notes with concern that our northern latitudes are exposed to the effects of climate change and global warming that may severely damage the unique and fragile ecosystems of the Barents region. Nature and renewable natural resources also constitute the material basis for indigenous culture. The council acknowledges the significant role of the Regional Working Group on Environment and underlines the need to support its activity and close cooperation with the Working Group on Environment. The Council therefore encourages a stronger engagement by the Meeting of the Ministers of the Environment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC).

Youth cooperation and BRYC

Youth are the architects of the future of the Barents region. Keeping youth in our region is a common Barents challenge. The Council stresses that it is crucial to strengthen the attractiveness of the Barents region and to make it more relevant to today's youth. The Council recognizes the work done by the Barents Regional Youth Council and its pivotal role in addressing these challenges. The Council appreciates all the good work that the national Swedish Chairmanship has put into youth, involving all working groups in elaborating youth recommendations that are scheduled to be welcomed during the BEAC Ministerial.

Transport and infrastructure development

The Council endorses the work done by governmental and regional transport authorities on implementation of the Joint Barents Transport Plan. The Council encourages national authorities to further strengthen their commitment.

The Council welcomes initiatives aimed at the development of navigation and intermodal transports in the Barents region bearing in mind future opportunities with regard to increased transport to and from Asia along the Northern Sea Route as well as rail and road.

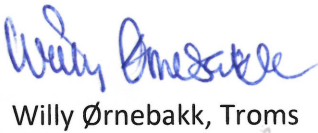
Indigenous peoples

The Barents Regional Council underlines the importance of the indigenous peoples' increasing role and participation in the Barents Co-operation and welcome the voiced ambitions in this respect, expressed in the IV Barents Indigenous Peoples Congress and II Barents Indigenous Peoples Summit outcome, held in Lycksele, Sweden in 2019.

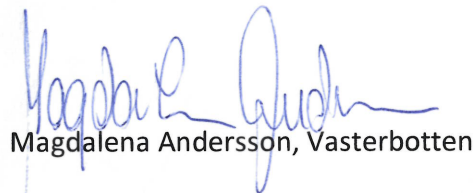
Barents in Arctic

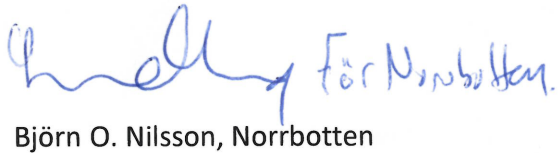
Northern Norway together with Northern Finland and Northern Sweden as well as Northwest Russia have common challenges and opportunities. We have long distances, sparse population and a cold climate, but our region is rich when it comes to natural resources. The Barents region has the highest number of inhabitants compared to other regions in the Arctic. It is crucial that the Barents region is an attractive region for everyone, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, and ability. Ensuring the presence of a stable population in the High North is important for stability in the region and beyond. The Council notes the increased global focus on the Arctic and encourages the ministers to include the regional view in the Arctic discussion.

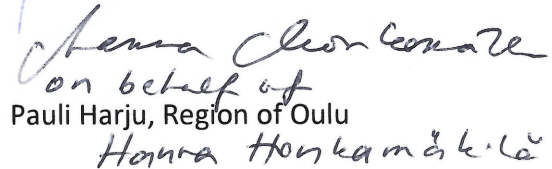

Tarjei Jensen Bech, Finnmark


Willy Ørnebakk, Troms


Thomas Norvoll, Nordland

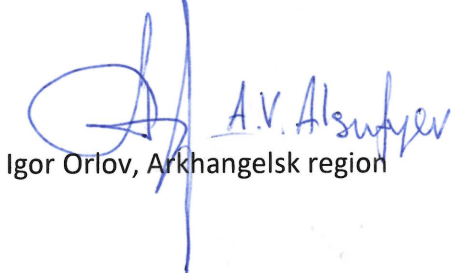

Magdalena Andersson, Vasterbotten


Björn O. Nilsson, Norrbotten


on behalf of
Pauli Harju, Region of Oulu
Hanna Honkanen

for 
Mika Riipi, Lapland

for 
Risto Poutiainen, North Karelia

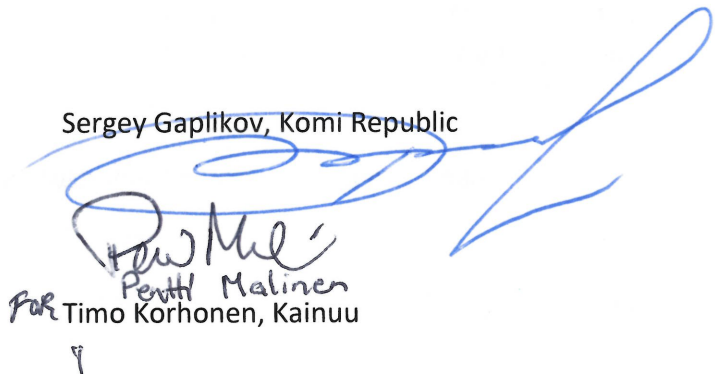

Igor Orlov, Arkhangelsk region

for 
Andrej Chibis, Murmansk region

Artur Parfenchikov, Republic of Karelia

Sergey Gaplikov, Komi Republic


Alexander Tsybulsky, Nenets A.O.


Pentti Malinen
for Timo Korhonen, Kainuu