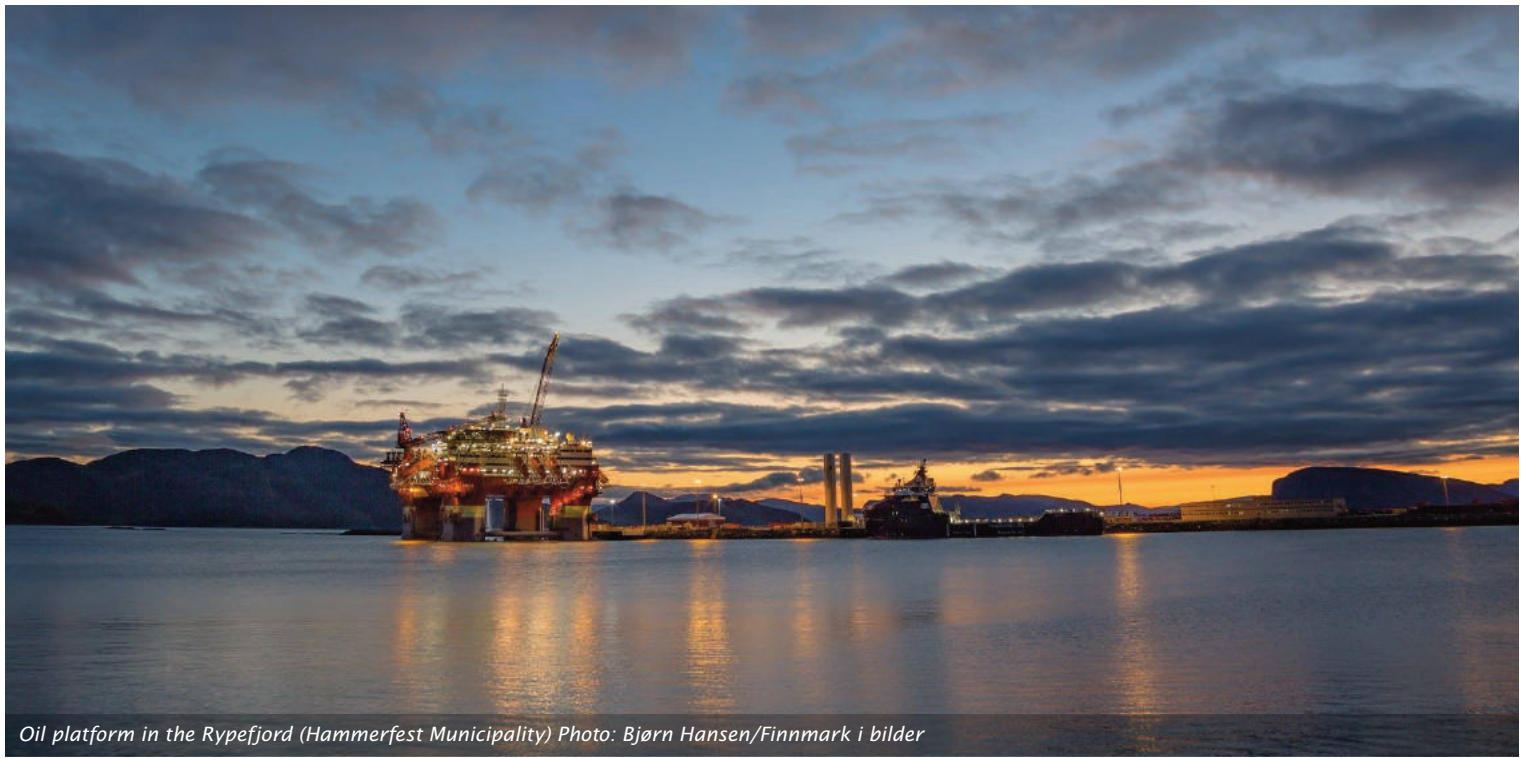


Chairmanship Priorities

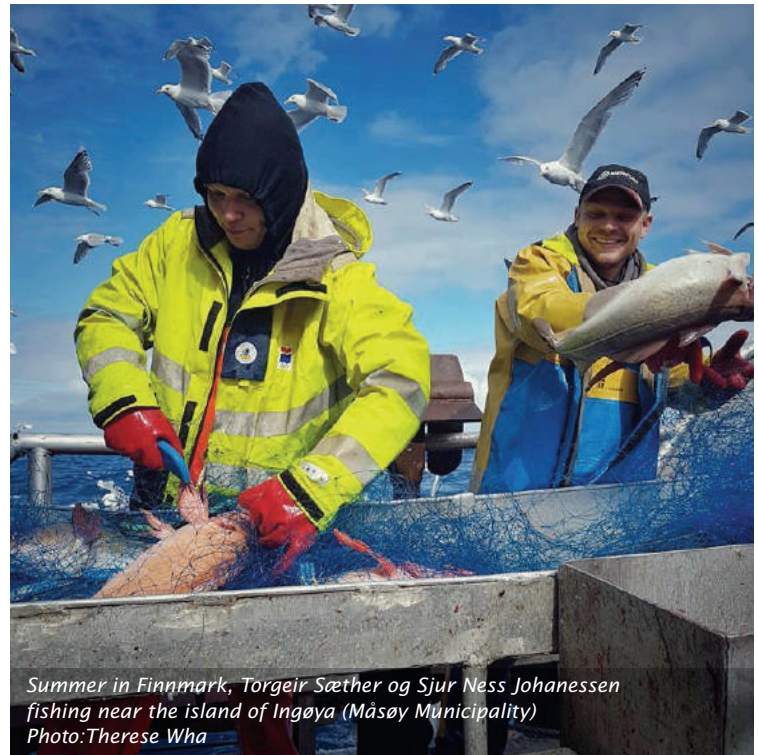




Oil platform in the Rypefjord (Hammerfest Municipality) Photo: Bjørn Hansen/Finnmark i bilder



On the way to the Arctic View Havøygaveln windmill park, on the top of the mountain in Havøysund (Måsøy Municipality) Photo: Bjørn Hansen/Finnmark i bilder



Summer in Finnmark, Torgeir Sæther og Sjur Ness Johanessen fishing near the island of Ingøya (Måsøy Municipality) Photo: Therese Wha

The population of Finnmark has been internationally oriented for centuries. When navigator Willem Barents discovered the Barents Sea in the end of 16th century, and explorer Roald Amundsen set off to the North Pole in the 1920s, they would make a last stop in Finnmark before the final leg of their journey. They stopped in Finnmark not only because it was the last stretch of European mainland, but also because it was already then, inhabited by a population that for generations had accumulated Arctic knowhow. Moreover, in the end of 18th century, the thriving trade in the Barents region led to the establishment of the two oldest towns in Finnmark, Vardø and Hammerfest.



Ragnhild Vassvik, Chair of the Barents Regional Council and Chair of Finnmark County Council.

Finnmark County is the northern- and easternmost county in Norway, a doorway to the shores of both the North Sea (Atlantic Ocean) and the Barents Sea (Arctic Ocean). It also borders the EU and the Russian Federation. Thus, Finnmark has been and will be putting a strong focus on international co-operation in the High North.

The whole Barents region has almost 6 million inhabitants and a surface area of 1,75 million square kilometers. It is more than the surface area of France, Spain and Portugal put together.

Northern Norway together with Northern Finland and Northern Sweden as well as Northwest Russia have common opportunities and challenges. Long distances, sparse population, cold climate but rich when it comes to natural resources.

The Barents region has the highest number of inhabitants compared to the other regions in the Arctic. Northern Norway alone has approximately five hundred thousand people, which constitutes 10 percent of Norway's total population. 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.

2018 marks the 25th anniversary for the establishment of the Barents co-operation. This is a good occasion to take stock and look into the future of this very important and unique cooperation.



The new Bøkfjord bridge makes it easier for visitors from Norway and Russia. It lights up the evening sky over Pasvik river. Photo: Bernt Nilsen



*Nordlandsbanen/ The Nordland Railway.
Photo: NSB*



*Coastal Express Hurtigruten right under the Salen Mountain in
Hammerfest. Photo: Bjørn Hansen/Finmark i bilder*

Our Priorities

Finnmark will pursue sustainable development in the Barents region with the following priorities:

Strengthening continuity through institutional development

The Finnmark Chairmanship intends to build on the work of the previous Chairs, both regional and national ones, as well as on the Kirkenes Declarations of 1993 and 2013. Focus on a “Barents Identity” will be continued. Challenges linked to transport connections and climate change remain high on the agenda. Finnmark will continue the good work in mainstreaming indigenous issues in the Barents cooperation. Priority will also be given to further strengthening the co-operation with other regional actors, including relevant EU organizations.

Economic development and environmental protection

In order to facilitate more effective border crossings, Finnmark intends to engage politically in promoting a visa free regime in the Barents region. By removing bottlenecks and promoting flexible border crossing, better conditions for cross-border transport will be ensured.

Finnmark will continue having a strong focus on a sustainable approach in all development activities taking place in the Barents region. The potential for green energy is very strong in the Barents region. Transmission capacities need to be improved.

Transport and infrastructure

Finnmark intends to follow up the good work done with the Joint Barents Transport Plan, coordinating its activities with the national levels as well as relevant road agencies. Finnmark further plans to take an active role in the Barents working group on transport and logistics.

In order to operationalize this co-operation, programs such as the Kolarctic ENI will be used as a financial instrument to support specific projects such as



establishing a tool for common planning as well as introducing Intelligent Transport Solutions. Together with its partners in Russia, Finland and Sweden, Finnmark also intends to implement the project “Barents on time” in order to improve information and infrastructure for cross-border public transport.

People-to-people co-operation

As chair of the Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC), Finnmark intends to emphasize the cultural dimension when it comes to people-to-people cooperation and work actively towards a further development of international cultural cooperation. Finnmark will also contribute to strengthening partnerships between cultural institutions and facilitating exchanges.

Finnmark further intends to implement and renew the cultural strategies of the JWGC 2014-2018.

The Barents Regional Youth Council will play an important part in the implementation of the Youth Program.

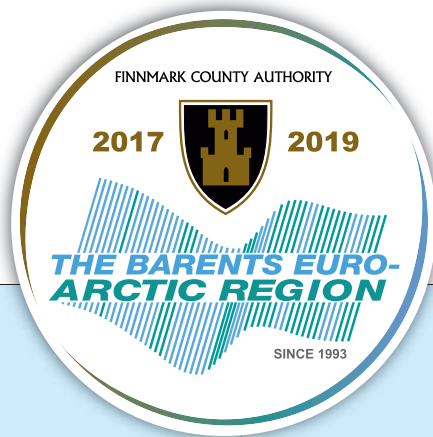
The Norwegian Barents Secretariat plays a particularly important role in promoting the Barents co-operation. Finnmark intends to actively use the Secretariat in further strengthening the co-operation, in particular when it comes to people-to-people co-operation.

Information and promotion

We note the increased interest towards the Arctic among global players. EU pursues its own policy concerning all the spheres of significance for our region. In 2016, a joint communication on Arctic Policy was issued. EU's regional policy is also acquiring a special importance for the Barents co-operation, especially in terms of regional support programs. In addition, the Arctic Council is becoming more and more significant. It is crucial that the Barents Co-operation raises its voice in all forums where decisions affecting our area are being made.

The Barents region should be brought forth, and joint efforts should be made in order to influence EU institutions in favour for the Barents region. Finnmark intends to enhance its interaction with its and other regional offices in Brussels.

Finnmark will further reinforce the visibility and recognition of the Barents cooperation through local and national media as well as social media.



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The Barents region, a part of Europe. Kart: barents.no

Photo front page:

1. Oil platform in the Rypefjord (Hammerfest Municipality)
 Photo: Bjørn Hansen/Finnmark i bilder facebook.com/groups/finnmarkibilder
2. Hammerfest at night Photo: Per-Jonny Rehnlund
3. Gas tanker Arctic Princess on its way to the Melkøya gas terminal (Hammerfest Municipality). Photo: Bjørn Hansen/Finnmark i bilder
4. Summer in Finnmark, Torgeir Sæther og Sjur Ness Johannesssen fishing near the island of Ingøya (Måsøy Municipality) Photo: Therese Wha

5. Rich cultural history in an exotic nature scenery: cave paintings and northern lights in Alta. Photo: Karl Ole Mella
6. On the way to the Arctic View Havøygaveln windmill park, on the top of the mountain in Havøysund (Måsøy Municipality) Photo: Bjørn Hansen/Finnmark i bilder
- 7 The Bøkfjord Bridge lighted up (Kirkenes Municipality). Photo: Bernt Nilsen
8. Coastal Express Hurtigruten right under the Salen Mountain in Hammerfest.
 Photo: Bjørn Hansen/Finnmark i bilder