



14TH SESSION OF THE
Barents Euro-Arctic Council
TROMSØ 29 OCTOBER 2013

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JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) convened its XIV Session under the chairmanship of Norway on 29 October 2013 in Tromsø.

Foreign ministers and senior representatives of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the European Union participated together with representatives of the Barents Regional Council, indigenous peoples, parliaments, regional bodies, observer states and invited guests.

1. The Council reaffirms its commitment to the fundamental principles and objectives of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region set out in the Kirkenes Declaration of January 1993.
2. The Council takes due note of the views expressed by prime ministers and other heads of delegation in the Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation in Kirkenes in June 2013.
3. The Council recalls that close interaction between national and regional levels and inter-regional cooperation are key elements of the Barents cooperation, and that the Barents Regional Council has a vital role to play in this context. The Council supports the Barents Programme 2014-18 as a basis for interregional cooperation.
4. The Council reaffirms the role of the Barents cooperation in strengthening mutual trust and stability in Europe through joint efforts in northern Europe based on a shared commitment to indivisible and comprehensive security. The Council recognises that urgent issues on the European agenda such as strengthening tolerance and combating radicalism, xenophobia and violent extremism demand additional efforts.
5. The Council takes note of the resolution of the 6th Barents Parliamentary Conference held in April 2013 in Harstad, which recommended closer contact between intergovernmental bodies and their corresponding parliamentary assemblies.
6. The Council recognises the important role of civil society in developments in the region, and supports the active involvement of NGOs in relevant aspects of the Barents cooperation.

7. The Council welcomes efforts to further strengthen coordination and synergy in the cross-regional cooperation with other regional councils, such as the Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Nordic Council of Ministers as well as with the Northern Dimension, in particular at working group level.

8. The Council endorses the work completed under the Norwegian chairmanship on the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation and awaits its formal adoption by the Ministers of Environment at their meeting on 4-5 December 2013 in Inari. The Council encourages the regions and the working groups to follow up and implement the priorities and projects in this plan without delay. Working groups should provide the Committee of Senior Officials with progress reports on a regular basis.

9. Efforts to integrate the environmental dimension into relevant parts of the Barents cooperation are vital. The Council welcomes the positive developments in relation to the Barents environmental “hotspots”, and calls for continued action to deal with these. It appreciates the new resources, for example from the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO), that have been made available for this purpose.

10. The Council underlines the importance of the work to reduce hazardous waste, long-range pollutants, short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon, and persistent organic pollutants like mercury. The large areas of clean environment and untouched wilderness in the region must be kept intact. The Council takes note of the need to strengthen cooperation on specially protected areas in the Barents region.

11. The Council underlines the importance of cooperation in the fields of emergency prevention, preparedness and response. Response to natural and man-made disasters, including oil spills and radioactive pollution, should be improved. The Council emphasises the importance of the biennial Barents Rescue Exercise and takes note of the successful exercise that was held in September 2013 in Troms.

12. The Council calls for strengthened cooperation on renewable energy and energy efficiency, for example through partnerships between local authorities and the business sector.

13. The Council emphasises that economic development requires sustainable use of natural resources, well-functioning transport infrastructure, technological innovation and action to address climate change. Prospects for enhanced economic cooperation in the Barents region, making full use of the knowledge and experience and skills to be found there, are encouraging. The Council also takes note of the positive developments regarding tourism in the Barents region. Gender equality is key to economic growth and prosperity.

14. The Council notes that the development of extractive industries has environmental and social impact. The Council commends the Seminar on Extractive Industries and Indigenous Peoples held in September 2012 in Tromsø and the Conference on Best Environmental Practices in the Mining

Sector in the Barents Region held in April 2013 in Rovaniemi for promoting environmental awareness, best practices and social responsibility.

15. The Council is pleased that the Kolarctic Cross-Border Cooperation Programme has become an important source of financing for Barents cooperation. The Council also welcomes the provision of the Barents Summit Declaration of 3-4 of June 2013 on investigating the possibility of establishing a financial mechanism in the Barents region to support project activities and to facilitate making full use of the regions investment potential. The Council decides to set up an ad-hoc expert group to conduct an extensive study on this issue.

16. The Council takes note of the Barents Industrial Partnership Meeting held in May 2013 in Tromsø, as well as the conclusions and recommendations in recent reports on economic and business cooperation in the Barents region, and encourages all relevant stakeholders to follow up on this priority issue.

17. The Council endorses the Joint Statement of Transport Ministers' Meeting held in September 2013 in Narvik, and welcomes the on-going work towards a Joint Barents Transport Plan. In this work the full potential of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics should be realised.

18. The Council takes note of the prospects of the Northern Sea Route for international shipping, encourages the continued development of infrastructure and emergency services along the route and emphasises that the development of offshore activities, based on the highest environmental and safety standards, would create additional business opportunities. The Council calls on all member states to give high priority to finalising a mandatory Polar Code within the framework of the International Maritime Organization.

19. The Council calls for the removal of all unnecessary border barriers and early completion of the joint efforts by the Russian Federation and the European Union towards the establishment of a visa-free regime for short term travel including through the complete implementation of the EU-Russia Common Steps. The Council supports the efforts of the European Union and the Russian Federation regarding increased mobility.

20. The Council welcomes increased cooperation in the field of education, research and innovation between relevant institutions in and beyond the Barents region. Language training, joint education programmes, exchange schemes and joint university degrees through the Bologna process are particularly important. Public and private actors must seek to establish new knowledge relating to emerging business opportunities in the Barents region. The promotion of entrepreneurship among young people and indigenous peoples is important. The Council welcomes the establishment of a Barents Summer School.

21. The Council appreciates cooperation on health and related social issues, and takes note of the increasing importance of this cooperation due to closer contact between people across the Barents region. The Barents programmes on fighting HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis are important. Cooperation on public health, emergency preparedness and response needs to be strengthened. The prevention and control of communicable diseases remains a topical issue. The Council calls for the relevant authorities in the BEAC region to strengthen cooperation so as to provide better assistance to patients suffering from non-communicable diseases. The Barents programme “Children and Youth at Risk” is a valuable contribution to efforts to ensure well-being for vulnerable groups.

22. Cultural cooperation is important for developing a common Barents identity. Civil society and culture institutions play key roles in this context. The Council welcomes the initiative to establish Barents Culture Awards to further encourage cross border cultural cooperation.

23. The Council recognises the importance of the work carried out by Barents Sports.

24. The Council recognises the importance of youth cooperation in promoting people-to-people contact and cross-border mobility in the Barents region, and underlines the need for further developing this cooperation with special emphasis on the participation and social inclusion of young people. The Council calls for efforts on the part of all member states to ensure that the Barents Youth Cooperation Office can continue to function.

25. The Council takes due note of the resolution of the Second Barents Indigenous Peoples’ Congress held in February 2012 in Kirkenes. The Council reaffirms the commitment of the Barents member states to fulfil their obligations regarding the rights of indigenous peoples, including their right to be consulted and to participate in decision-making at all levels through representatives chosen by themselves, their right to pursue their livelihoods, and their right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for their own development. The Council also recognises the relevance of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in this context.

26. The Council invites the Chair of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples as a permanent observer to the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.

The Council expresses its gratitude to the outgoing BEAC chair, the Kingdom of Norway, and to the outgoing chair of the BRC, the region of Norrbotten, Sweden, as well as to all other parties for their excellent work, and welcomes the incoming chair of the BEAC, Finland, and of the BRC, the region of Arkhangelsk. The Council welcomes the Finnish chairmanship’s priorities.

The Council welcomes the Finnish invitation to the XV Session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 2015 in Finland.