



## **Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation**

**(Kirkenes, Norway, 3–4 June 2013)**

**Prime Ministers and other high-level representatives of the members of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, i.e. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the European Union, state as follows:**

On 11 January 1993, ministers of foreign affairs or other representatives of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the Commission of the European Communities signed a declaration on cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic region (hereinafter referred to as the Kirkenes Declaration), in which they expressed their conviction that expanded cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region would contribute substantially to stability and progress in the area and in Europe as a whole. The confrontation and division that characterised the past would be replaced by cooperation and partnership. The parties believed that such cooperation would contribute to international peace and security. They saw the Barents cooperation as part of the process of evolving European cooperation and integration. The participants concerned also reaffirmed their commitment to the rights of the indigenous peoples in the north, and stated their commitment to strengthening the indigenous communities of the region.

Twenty years later, we reaffirm our commitment to the principles of the Kirkenes Declaration. Significant achievements have been made in the Barents Euro-Arctic region. This is due to the important role the Barents cooperation has played in strengthening mutual trust, stability and security in Europe, by joint efforts in northern Europe based on the shared commitment to indivisible and comprehensive security. Likewise it has contributed to a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in the region.

The Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Kingdom of Norway concerning Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean of 15 September 2010 is an illustration of the decisive role that trust can play in settling disputes and creating new opportunities for cooperation. We note with great satisfaction that there are now no more unsettled delimitation issues in the region. Mutual trust built through the Barents Cooperation can thus serve as a model for others on how neighbouring countries

can resolve differences peacefully through dialogue and negotiations, and thus help release the huge potential of the regional and European integration.

When the Kirkenes Declaration was signed in 1993, the Barents region was on the periphery of Europe. Today, the Barents region is anything but peripheral. It is developing so fast, not least in economic terms, that the demand for cooperation is greater today than ever.

In 2003, again in Kirkenes, the heads of the six governments and a representative of the European Commission declared the Barents cooperation to be a unique undertaking that confirms the value of close interaction between intergovernmental cooperation, cooperation among county administrations and direct people-to-people cooperation. They undertook to develop our societies in full respect of internationally recognized principles for ensuring sustainable development.

The achievements of these 20 years of cooperation are primarily the result of local and regional initiatives and activities by various communities and institutions, businesses and civil society. Through their active involvement at all levels and in all areas, it is the peoples of the region who have made the most significant contributions. Cooperation at the regional level has been, and will continue to be, a key element of the Barents cooperation. We appreciate the important role that the Barents Regional Council has played, both within the region and increasingly also in contacts with the rest of Europe. The Barents cooperation has also become an important arena for popularly elected representatives at national and regional level.

Today, 20 years after the signing of the Kirkenes Declaration, the Barents region is undergoing major economic, environmental and social changes. The increase in the global demand for natural resources and the consequences of global warming have given rise to both challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed through regional cooperation. The challenge is to reap the full benefit of the positive changes while minimising the negative impact on human well-being, traditional lifestyles and the environment.

## **ECONOMY**

We strongly support the continued development of cooperation in all relevant areas, with the well-being of people of the region as the overriding goal. The Barents region has the potential to become an innovative region that could be an example for other regions in Europe. The Barents cooperation can serve as a model for European border dialogues and for sustainable development.

We believe that it is particularly important that the region's natural resources are managed in a sustainable manner in order to secure long-term prosperity, and that use is made of the best available technology and know-how. The regional resource potential includes not only

gas and oil but also other mineral resources, fish and other seafood, knowledge and experience, and skilled personnel, all of which should be used to the benefit of the region.

We recognise that indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for their own development. We acknowledge our obligation to ensure full respect for and implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples to continuously pursue their traditional livelihoods, including hunting, fishing and herding, in accordance with their own traditions and customs, within the framework of sustainable management and harvesting and international obligations. Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters that would affect their rights.

As members of the World Trade Organization, we should promote and facilitate more business cooperation and trade. We will work to eliminate barriers that have been unnecessary obstacles to trade and cooperation.

We note that economic and social development in the Barents region requires better transport connections. A key factor both for business purposes and for passenger traffic is the further development of east–west transport networks, including regional air services. We are therefore encouraged by the work to draw up a Joint Barents Transport Plan, covering all transport modes and focusing on transport corridors between Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway.

It is important to increase cooperation on the development of ports and marine terminals. The demand for service facilities, emergency preparedness etc. along new sailing routes, in particular the Northern Sea Route, will provide important business opportunities in all the Barents Euro-Arctic states. The development of offshore oil and gas activities will create additional business opportunities. These activities should follow the highest environmental standards and promote sustainable development of the region.

## **FINANCE**

We stress the importance of regional development and cross-border cooperation programmes that are funded jointly by the EU, Russia, Finland, Norway and Sweden in connection with the implementation of projects in the Barents region. We express support for the continuation of such programmes and their further alignment with Barents cooperation. Equal access for all Barents regions to the opportunities offered by these programmes would benefit the Barents cooperation as a whole.

We welcome the proposal by the Russian Federation to investigate the possibility of establishing a financial mechanism in the Barents region to support project activities and to facilitate making full use of the region's investment potential. We encourage the Barents Euro-Arctic Council to take appropriate action in this regard.

## **PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONTACTS**

The sharp increase in the number of border crossings is perhaps the best illustration of the positive developments in the Barents region. We will, as far as possible, continue to make border crossing regimes more efficient, while pursuing the common goal of visa-free, short-term travel for our citizens. Enhancing labour mobility in the Barents region should also be a long-term goal. We will encourage a study of additional feasible steps to ease and promote border crossing.

Tourism and people-to-people contacts across borders have increased significantly during the past 20 years. There is considerable potential for further growth in tourism, which would have a positive impact on local employment and development.

It is important to bring young people from various parts of the region together, with a view to fostering positive involvement and interaction in both national and international arenas. The Barents Regional Youth Council and the Barents Youth Cooperation Office have important roles in this context. People-to-people contacts continue to be a key to positive development in the region.

Civil society cooperation has an important role to play in the promotion of sustainable development and people-to-people contacts. We encourage enhanced cross-border connections and cooperation between non-governmental organisations including youth organisations and mass media in the Barents region.

We are committed to ensuring that the rights of indigenous peoples are fully respected in all aspects of the cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. We also welcome the increased cross-border contacts and cooperation between indigenous peoples.

## **KNOWLEDGE**

Since 1993 we have seen increasingly successful cooperation between educational and research institutions in the Barents region. We express our strong support for a further strengthening of cooperation in the fields of education, research and innovation. People, and in particular young people, are the most important driving force in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. We are convinced that equal opportunities in education and work, as well as gender equality, are key to economic activity, growth and prosperity.

To enhance prospects for future well-being and prosperity in the Barents region, it is crucial that communities succeed in developing knowledge and skills by promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, in particular among young people and indigenous peoples.

We support the establishment of a rotating Barents Summer School, as well as joint education programmes, language training, and exchange programmes.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

We share a deep concern about global climate change. The impact of global warming is already visible in the Barents region, which is particularly sensitive to changes in the climate. We will therefore contribute to the efforts to meet the long-term goal of limiting the increase in global average temperature to below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

The Barents region is not a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, but more can be done to reduce local emissions, for instance through greater attention to black carbon, energy efficiency and enhanced utilisation of renewable energy sources.

Adaptation to the impacts of climate change in the Barents region is a major challenge that requires cooperation at national, regional and local levels. We encourage systematic exchange of experience and the development of adaptation strategies, and in this context look forward to the proposals of the BEAC Climate Change Action Plan. It is crucial to gain better understanding of climate change, how it will affect regions, local communities and indigenous peoples, and what must be done to address it. Institutions of higher education and research in the region should play a key role in the production and dissemination of this knowledge.

The environment in the Barents region is fragile. We stress the need for serious environmental considerations and the use of best available technology and best practices in the planning of all economic activities and urban development. Due regard should be paid to corporate social responsibility and to sustainable production and consumption. We recognise that traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples can contribute to the sustainable development of resources, and that such knowledge also plays a vital role in ensuring sustainable development in the region.

We support continued efforts to identify the most acute environmental problems and to implement abatement measures in so-called “environmental hot spots”.

## **CULTURE AND HEALTH**

Culture has been essential in the development of the Barents cooperation and has played an important part in bringing people together. Such activities promote cultural diversity, and multicultural dialogue and interaction, as well as regional, social and economic development.

With the continuous increases in contacts across borders and more integrated labour markets, cooperation and coordination between health institutions and authorities need to be further strengthened. Special attention should be given to emergency preparedness, prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases and securing social well-being for vulnerable groups and the general population.

## **CHALLENGES**

Urgent issues on the European agenda, such as strengthening tolerance and combating radicalism, xenophobia and violent extremism, relate to discrimination, social exclusion and negative stereotyping of minorities. In order to solve these problems, we need to use wide-ranging efforts in such areas as legislation, education, social dialogue and awareness-raising. Although responsibility for combating hate crime and intolerance primarily lies with the state authorities, civil society can play a crucial role in this endeavour.

We continue to support cooperation on prevention and response to emergencies, and protection of the population and ecology in the Arctic and Barents region. We underline the importance of the agreement between the governments in the Barents Euro-Arctic region on cooperation in the fields of emergency prevention, preparedness and response, and the importance of international Barents Rescue exercises.

We support initiatives to improve nuclear emergency response measures in order to protect the population, the environment and other important public interests against radioactive pollution.

## **KEY ACTORS**

The indigenous peoples, with their invaluable traditional knowledge, must continue to play an active role in the development of the region. We support a further strengthening of indigenous peoples' representation in the Barents cooperation.

We support efforts to achieve synergies and to strengthen coherence in common areas of activity with other regional councils in the north, including the Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and the Nordic Council of Ministers. We are determined to intensify cooperation with the Northern Dimension and its partnerships.

We invite the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council, and also the Barents Parliamentary Conference and the Barents Indigenous Peoples Congress, to follow up on the above mentioned visions and priorities.

