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2nd Barents Parliamentary Conference Conclusions of the Chair

For the sake of good order, CSO Chair sends the *Conclusions of the Chair* of the Barents Parliamentary Conference held in Bodø on 29 – 30 June 2005.

2nd Barents Parliamentary Conference, Bodø, June 29-30 2005

Conclusions of the Chair

By invitation from the Norwegian parliament (the Storting) and the Nordic Council, parliamentarians from the five Nordic countries, the three Nordic autonomous territories, Russia, the European Parliament, representatives of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Arctic Council, Saami Parliamentary Council, the Barents Regional Council and of the indigenous peoples of the Barents region as well as local politicians from the Barents region gathered in Bodø on June 29-30th 2005. Representatives from the Baltic Assembly, Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union, the Benelux Interparliamentary Council, the Standing Committee of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region took part in the conference as observers.

The three main topics of discussion at the conference were: Cooperation in Northern Europe, sustainable development and economic activity in the Barents region and the role of and conditions for the indigenous population in the Barents region.

The development of the cooperation in the Barents region since the establishment of the Barents cooperation in 1993 is very positive. Close contacts between people across the borders have been established and the economic cooperation is developing continuously and has a big potential.

It is important to view the cooperation between the countries and the regions in the Barents region in the context of the challenges and the efforts being made in the whole of Northern Europe. When it comes to questions of a wider interest to the northern part of Europe, one has to seek cooperation with other regional organizations like the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea states, the Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council.. A good coordination and dialogue is of fundamental importance in order to get a clear picture of existing competence, resources and of the different roles played by these organizations, and also to better the joint effects of the work. These organizations should jointly put the socio-economic and environmental challenges in the northern part of Europe on the European agenda. A good dialogue between the governmental side, the parliamentarian side and the regional side is decisive in order to succeed in this work.

The rich natural resources of the North is a strong contributing factor to the rising interest in the Northern areas and the welfare of the people in the area. It is assumed that a considerable part of the undiscovered oil and gas resources of the world is to be found in the Arctic. The rich fish resources are being enjoyed by a great part of the population of the world. The parliaments and regional bodies have political responsibility for managing the natural resources in a sustainable and secure way.

Several interventions pointed at the need for a balance between the economic development and the environmental considerations. There are serious environmental challenges related to production and transport of oil and gas. It is important to encourage the governments to agree upon environmental standards for the oil and gas activities in the Barents Sea and to further develop cooperation on preparedness and rescue services in case of accidents and oil-spills.

The chair noted the strong attention paid by the participants to the environmental problems in connection with nuclear waste as well as the importance of continuing and strengthening the clean-up work in this field. The coming into force of the Kyoto protocol is an important step in order to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases. Great concern was expressed over the climatic changes presented in the “Arctic Climate Impact Assessment”, a report worked out by the Arctic Council. Governments should be encouraged to continue the work through international organizations in order to diminish the human-induced climatic changes and to work out political initiatives in order to prepare and adapt the societies to the consequences of climatic change.

Indigenous peoples should be involved in the decision-making in cases where their interests are affected. In the balance between economic development on the basis of the rich natural resources on the one hand, and protection of the environment and the traditional way-of-life of the people living in the Arctic on the other, the knowledge and the experience of the indigenous peoples will be of use. It is important to promote cooperation between the indigenous peoples across the borders so that they might protect and develop their culture in a better way.

“Arctic Human Development Report”, a report worked out by the Arctic Council, is an important document and gives a good picture of life in the North. Scientific work giving a comprehensive picture of the situation is an important tool in working out a policy for developing vigorous societies in the Northern areas.

On invitation by the Norwegian parliament (the Storting), a follow-up meeting on the outcome of the Bodø-conference will be arranged in Oslo by the Nordic Council and the Storting with participants from the parliaments of the states of Northern Europe. The European Parliament, the Standing Committee of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC), the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPARG) as well as representatives of the Barents regional level, will also be invited to take part in the meeting.