

# **SWEDISH CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE BARENTS EURO- ARCTIC COUNCIL WORKING GROUP ON YOUTH POLICY**

## **A SUMMARY AND COMPILATION OF ACTIVITIES DURING 2009-2011**

### ***Background***

In 2009, the Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation in the youth field marked its tenth anniversary. The ten years of fruitful work was celebrated under the Russian chairmanship by a Ministerial Conference in Murmansk in September 2009.

The conference put together a declaration that drew up principles, made proposals and issued recommendations in order to strengthen the cooperation in the field of youth policy in the Barents region even further. The core messages were that realizing the capacity of young people is a fundamental precondition for a prosperous future for the Barents Euro-Arctic region. The declaration stated that young people are an important strategic resource and could contribute to a sustainable development of the region. Among the most valuable characteristics of young people are their education and skills, their mobility, their quick adaptation and their creative potential. Thanks to those characteristics young people are uniquely positioned to activate cultural, social and economical mechanisms of intensive innovative development of their countries and the Barents region as such.

### ***Swedish priorities***

The Swedish chairmanship began in October 2009 and the overarching priorities of the chairmanship were to further promote young people's active citizenship and to strengthen the networks and international contacts of young people and youth organisations. Furthermore, special attention was paid to the role of the Barents Youth Cooperation Office.

The first mission of the Swedish chairmanship was to implement the recommendations from the Conference of Ministers of Youth Policy held in Murmansk. An important task outlined in those recommendations was to develop a new Plan of Action for the work of the Working Group of Youth Policy (WGYF). Other important priorities were to enhance cooperation with relevant working groups within the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Barents Regional Council (BRC), as well as with other cooperation structures in the region.

## **Activities**

### **Ordinary WGYE meetings**

The WGYE held four ordinary meetings during 2009-2011. The WG group met both in Stockholm and in the regional county capitals Luleå and Umeå. The agenda for each meeting included handling ongoing activities of the WG such as the supervision of Barents Youth Cooperation Office (BYCO) activities and maintaining overview of youth policy issues in the region, as well as dealing with the specific areas outlined below.

16-17 November 2009 in Stockholm - The meeting was chaired by Eva Theisz of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs. The agenda included a presentation of the Swedish chairmanship over all priorities as well in the youth field.

24-25 February 2010 in Luleå - The meeting was chaired by Björn Jaaberg Hansen, Ministry of Children and Equality, Norway, due to the absence of the Swedish chair for health reasons. The agenda included a first discussion of the new plan of action for the WGYE. The meeting was organized back to back with a meeting of the Regional Working Group on Youth Issues (RWGYI).

7-8 October 2010 in Stockholm - The meeting was chaired by Eva Theisz, the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs. The agenda included a first discussion of merging the national and regional WG.

10-11 March 2011 in Umeå - The meeting was chaired by Eva Theisz of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs. The agenda included the discussion of a future merger with the RWGYI and resulted in an agreement to proceed with the merger. The meeting was organized back to back with RWGYI and Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) meetings.

In accordance with the request of the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), the Swedish chairmanship was present at the CSO meeting held in Jokkmokk on 2-4 February 2011 to inform about the WGYE activities during the previous year and the plans for 2011.

The chair also regularly attended chairmanship reference group meetings held by the Swedish Barents Secretariat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to inform about developments within the Barents youth cooperation.

Furthermore, a representative from the Swedish chairmanship was present at the RWGYI meeting held in Kirkenes 28 October 2010, and at BRYCs annual event of Barents Passion Week 27-31 October 2010 in Kirkenes.

On 10-11 October 2011 the chairmanship was transferred from Sweden to Norway.

### **Merger with RWGYI**

A possible merger of the WGYP and RWGYI was brought up at an early stage of the Swedish chairmanship and a comparative analysis of the objectives, structures, mandates etc. of the two working groups was drafted jointly by their chairs. After thorough discussions in both groups, a common decision to merge the groups was taken at the ordinary meeting in Umeå in March 2010.

The chairs of WGYP and RWGYI were assigned to draft the Terms of Reference for a joint working group called *Joint Working group on Youth (JWGY)*. The Terms of Reference are based on the current *Plan of Action* of WGYP and the *Regional Youth Programme* of RWGYI. The terms were adopted by both groups during the summer of 2011. Thereafter the merger was accepted by the CSO and the Regional Committee (RC) at their respective meetings in October of the same year. The founding meeting was held under the Norwegian chairmanship in November 2011.

The objectives of the JWGY will be:

- promoting a cross-sectorial youth policy approach through a sharing of experiences
- strengthening the dialogue between the young people and the decision makers
- emphasising the role of the BYCO in providing information and guidance services for young people
- increasing the shared knowledge of current youth issues in the region by promoting the cooperation between all structures
- promoting and supporting multilateral cooperation between youth groups and non-governmental child and youth organisation in the region.
- implementing of the Barents Regional Youth Programme
- supporting the BRYC.

### **Meetings of the Barents Stakeholders in the youth field**

The Swedish chairmanship initiated a new form of cooperation between the different structures in the Barents youth cooperation. The aim was to enhance the efficiency and to find synergies between said structures. The stakeholders worked on developing and coordinating ways of cooperation in order to make it even more fruitful and effective in the future. In addition the representatives were informed of the opportunities for project funding within the EU Youth in Action Programme. Representatives of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat (NBS), International Barents Secretariat (IBS), BYCO, BRYC, RWGYI and WGYP were all invited and present at the three Barents Stakeholder meetings held in 2010-11.

29 November in Oslo: The meeting tackled an inventory of the actors target groups; Contribution of the respective structures; How can the actors optimize and complement each other's work?; and also included a training in Youth in Action.

9 March 2011 in Umeå: This meeting consisted of creating a "Barents youth map" – including synchronizing the actors work, as well as the next steps in using Youth in Action as a tool in the Barents region. Furthermore the group gave an input to the outline of the possible joint working group on youth.

4-5 October 2011, in Kirkenes: The group discussed which issues within the Barents Youth Cooperation the different structures wanted to highlight in 2012 and beyond. Also the division of tasks and support needed within each organisation to complete the tasks was outlined.

The feedback from the actors was very positive, and the meetings clearly fulfilled a need to synergize activities. The group pinpointed several areas that need development and enhanced cooperation in order to strengthen the Barents youth field, one of them being BRYCs need of a strong support from the regions and countries another the recognition of difficulties facing youth representatives on the regional level. The role and tasks of the BYCO were further strengthened and developed by these meetings.

### **The Swedish chairmanship conference**

The Swedish chairmanship conference *From Passion to Action* was planned to be held in Umeå in May 2011. The conference aimed to promote young peoples' real influence by creating a structured dialogue between young people, local/regional decision makers and civil servants throughout the Barents region. This was planned as a next step of the previous BRYC events and aiming for concrete action plans in the respective regions.

Preparatory meetings for the event were organised in 2010-2011, which were held as at several occasions together with actors such as BYCO, BRYC, RWGYI, IBS and NBS. This included the entire chain from analysing needs and target groups, developing aims and objectives through methodologies to practicalities such as invitations, time planning and venue considerations. Unfortunately the conference was cancelled due to a low number of registered participants. Despite this, the chairmanship noted the interest of such dialogues in the region, and therefore continued with the Barents Stakeholders meetings as one step to enhance cooperation. The need for dialogue and support for youth representatives remains a vital importance in the region.

### **Steering and supporting BYCO**

The Barents Youth Cooperation Office (BYCO) was established in 2002 in order to provide support and guidance to international youth projects in the Barents region. The office is co-financed by the governments of Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden.

The structures for steering and supporting the Barents Youth Cooperation Office (BYCO) were enhanced and further developed under 2009-2011 and included work on several levels. BYCO work plans were improved with a further focus on aims, objectives and realizable measures, and the entire structure of reporting and monitoring was revised during the Swedish chairmanship. Meetings with BYCOs youth coordinator Maria Petrova were held at regular intervals throughout the years, both via Skype and face-to-face meetings.

In addition the chairmanship put extra resources into developing the skills and competencies of the staff of the BYCO, by offering training courses in Sweden and the Netherlands through the Youth in Action programme. This has improved the organisational, intercultural and management skills of the BYCO staff, also serving as inspiration and best practices to bring back to the own organisation.

In 2010 the WGYP and its four countries also extended the framework contract with BYCO offices until the end of 2013. A revised contract was developed by the chairmanship. However, the administration, book keeping and host organisation of the BYCO remains less stable than the chairmanship wished for, due to national legislations in Russia which makes the set-up cumbersome at times. The chairmanship also supported BYCO in the work to facilitate the ongoing funding as agreed between the different governments and BYCO offices.

The chairmanship also provided relevant background information to IBS when the secretariat prepared documents requested by the CSO about the performances of BYCO. The outcomes from IBS showed a favourable result, highlighting BYCOs efficiency and effectiveness compared over time.

## **Conclusions**

The main achievement during the Swedish chairmanship period was the merger of the two working groups on governmental and regional levels as well as the development of the new Terms of Reference.

The chairmanship has during its presidency also expanded and smoothed the cooperation between the different actors within the Barents youth field. Success factors have mainly been the fruitful combination of hands-on-activities; such as the steering and support of the BYCO, providing stakeholders in the Barents region with knowledge and competencies of project funding, paired with a strategic approach within the youth policy field.

Following the transfer of the chairmanship to our Norwegian colleagues, the Swedish representative will shift focus from the international arena more to the national contribution in the Barents cooperation. The Swedish representative now envisages to take the next steps in its efforts of strengthening and promoting youth work and youth participation in the regions of Norrbotten and Västerbotten.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank the members of WGYP, RWGYI, BYCO, BRYC, IBS, NBS and others involved in Barents youth cooperation for their excellent contributions during our chairmanship.