

## **JOINT COMMUNIQUE**

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council convened its Eighth Session in Murmansk on 14-15 March 2001 under the chairmanship of Russia.

Ministers and senior representatives from the Member States (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation and Sweden) participated in the Session which was also attended by the EU Presidency (Sweden) and a senior representative of the European Commission together with:

senior representatives from Observer States (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States of America),

governors, political leaders and other representatives of the Barents Regional Council and a representative of the indigenous peoples of the region,

representatives of the Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, the Nordic Environmental Finance Corporation and the Contact Experts Group under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

## I. Opening statements

1. **Recalling** the principles and objectives of the Kirkenes Declaration of January 1993, the Council **encouraged** progress in the realization of a basic principle of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) - strengthening cooperation among states. This progress should be achieved in no small part due to the activities of such subregional structures, as the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). In this connection the Council **recalled** that the Istanbul OSCE summit of November 1999 in the Platform for Cooperative Security pointed out the growing importance of subregional groupings in the work of the OSCE and concluded in the Charter for European Security that subregional cooperation has become an important element of enhancing security across the OSCE area.

2. **Reaffirming** its strong commitment to continue promoting Barents cooperation in the fields of economic cooperation, energy, transport, forestry, environment, health, youth policies, culture, education and research and to encourage people-to-people contacts the Council **pledges** to work further in the interests of upgrading the well-being of the peoples of the region and narrowing the existing gaps in this area.

3. The Council **noted with satisfaction** a good start in the implementation of the Barents Programme for 2000-2003, adopted by the Regional Council in December 1999.

4. The Council **welcomed** the growing tendency for broader coordination among subregional structures such as the BEAC, the CBSS, the Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers and others, with the aim to maximize the effectiveness of cooperation in different fields. The Council **recognized** efforts in this direction of the Government of the Russian Federation which in February 2001 approved the Concept of Cross-Border Cooperation in the Russian Federation. The Council also

**welcomed** cooperation on northern issues between the EU and its transatlantic partners - the USA and Canada.

5. The Council **regarded** as an important achievement the endorsement by the European Council in Feira in June 2000 of the Action Plan for the Northern Dimension in the external and cross-border policies of the European Union 2000-2003. The Council **took into account** that since the Northern Dimension is an ongoing process, the Action Plan requires regular review in relation to frameworks and programmes and their respective priorities as they are developed. The Council **expressed its intention** to continue to play an active role in the implementation of the Action Plan and further development and concretization of the Northern Dimension. In this context the Council **expressed its appreciation** for the contribution being prepared by the CSO.

6. The Council **confirmed appreciation** of the positive role played by bilateral, the EU and other international instruments in providing financial and technical support for regional cooperation. The Council **encouraged** efforts to enhance the effectiveness and transparency of TACIS, INTERREG and other relevant programmes. The Council **noted with satisfaction** the preparation of the new INTERREG III programmes to enhance regional cooperation for the period 2001-2006. The Council **welcomed** the initiative from the 9<sup>th</sup> ministerial session of the CBSS in Bergen in June 2000, aiming at establishing the North-European Fund for Subregional Development in the Barents and the Baltic Sea regions. The Council **welcomed** the construction of the Salla border crossing point on the Russian side of the border with the EU TACIS assistance.

7. The Council **continues to proceed from the premise** that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the Russian Federation together with the EU Common Strategy for Russia adopted in June 1999 and

the Russian Mid-Term Strategy for the Development of Relations with the EU for 2000 – 2010 contribute to deepening subregional cooperation in Northern Europe.

8. The Council **noted with satisfaction** continuing cooperation in the Barents region aimed at increasing confidence and enhancing security. Cooperative efforts to alleviate the consequences of the catastrophe of the Russian submarine “Kursk” provide an example, however tragic, of the usefulness of such cooperation.

9. The Council **highly appreciated** the contribution of the parties who have assisted Russia in the development and implementation of projects in the field of nuclear and radioactive safety. The Council **confirmed** its support for the development of a comprehensive plan in cooperation with the Contact Experts Group for high priority projects in Russia.

10. The Council **welcomed** a long awaited significant progress achieved in recent time in overcoming the remaining issues in the negotiations on the agreement on the Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme for Russia (MNEPR), which opens the way to concluding the agreement without undue delay. The Council **urged** the parties concerned to intensify their efforts towards the early conclusion of this agreement. In this context the Council **stressed** the importance of the agreement in creating conditions for enhanced cooperation in the areas of nuclear safety and the safe management of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste.

11. The Council **noted** the intensification of the activities of the Working Group on the Northern Sea Route aimed at resolving problems related to its commercial use, with due attention to environmental aspects and to social and economic development of adjacent areas.

12. The Council **welcomed** the results of the meeting of the Ministers of Transport of the BEAC member-states in St-Petersburg on 13 September 2000. The Council **pointed out** the importance of regular meetings of Ministers of transport at

which the results of previous work are discussed and common positions are agreed on the development of cooperation in the area of transport in the Barents region, including the realization of concrete projects to enhance transport infrastructure.

13. The Council **expressed satisfaction** with the conclusion of the report on the “Comparative Study of Foreign Investments in the Russian Territories of the Barents Region” which provides data for active investors in the area. The Council **took note** of the latest bills adopted or under consideration in Russia (on taxation, production sharing and land legislation) and **expressed confidence** that such steps would significantly and positively change the outlook of potential foreign investors.

14. The Council **endorsed** certification as Barents Energy Focal Points of the Regional Energy Efficiency Centers in Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Petrozavodsk and Kirovsk, undertaken under the initiative of the BEAC Committee of Senior Officials with the aim to provide additional impetus to cooperation in the area of energy efficiency and energy conservation.

15. The Council **continues to believe** in the usefulness of joint financing (including in-kind contribution) of activities for example in the Forest Sector Task Force and the Task Force II on Trade Barriers.

## **II. Further Cooperation.**

16. The Council **endorsed** the activities of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation, including the work to diminish barriers to border crossing and trade, investment climate research and development of the forest sector action plan. The Council **noted** steps to increase coordination with the relevant CBSS working group.

17. The Council **welcomed** the solid progress in the activities carried out by the Task Force II on Trade Barriers in accordance with the approved Action Plan. The Council **recognized** the practical value of the projects fulfilled by the Task Force II for better cross-border cooperation and **approved** the continuation of the mandate of the Task Force II based on its new Action Plan and jointly financed budget, as decided by the Working Group on Economic Cooperation. The Council **pointed out** the importance of further efforts in the development of logistic chains in the Barents area, as well as in the simplification of border crossing procedures and optimization of the locations of international border crossing points of Russia, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

18. The Council **noted with satisfaction** the development of the Forest Sector Programme for the Northern Dimension calling on the European Union and the BEAC countries to reflect in their policies the proposals formulated in the Programme. The Council **welcomed** the decision by the Committee of Senior Officials to continue the work of the Task Force under the Working Group on Economic Cooperation with the aim to promote the Barents region forest sector cooperation and to address problems related to forests, forest ecosystems and their biodiversity, as well as forestry legislation and regulations.

19. The Council **noted with appreciation** that the work of the Ad hoc Energy Working Group is developing in line with the spirit of the Russia-EU dialogue on energy issues and has contributed to the process of improving the energy situation in the Barents Euro-Arctic region. During the three-year mandate of the Ad hoc Energy Working Group a wide network of energy actors has been created. Energy projects aiming at energy efficiency and renewable energy resources have been planned and implemented. A Barents Energy Website is under implementation. Distribution of energy related information about the Barents region has been improved and expanded. The Council **emphasized** that continued support for local actors is needed.

The network of the Working Group is a valuable asset for dissemination of information, sharing of experiences and project implementation. It provides a well-focused, concentrated and concrete work process. The Council **decided** to prolong the mandate of the Working Group on Energy for another three years. The Council **noted** that coordination with other relevant international initiatives within and outside the Barents region should be further improved.

20. The Council **approved** the continued attention to environmental problems and sustainable development at the local, regional and national levels. The Council **noted with satisfaction** the work of the Senior Environmental Officials in strengthening cooperation on Cleaner Production. Support for Cleaner Production projects in Russia through the Nordic Environmental Financing Corporation has been encouraged. Capacity building has been strengthened through the training of an impressive number of Russian engineers within the six years of the Programme's operation and through closer cooperation between the Energy Efficiency Centers and the Cleaner Production Centers. The Council **took note** of the idea to develop the Environmental Investment Financing Facility for small and medium size projects of Northwest Russia according to the Action Plan for the Northern Dimension endorsed in Feira in June 2000. The Council **supported** the proposal to strengthen cooperation through joint implementation of projects aiming at reduction of greenhouse gasses emissions mainly through energy efficiency measures and introduction of renewable energy sources. The Council **noted with satisfaction** that cooperation in the field of conservation of biological diversity in the Barents region continued successfully over the years. The Council **endorsed** cooperation on cultural heritage and local development, i.a. on the Solovetsky Archipelago and the monastery. The Council **encouraged** increased focus on people-to-people cooperation and community-to-community cooperation as essential tools of environmental cooperation in

the Barents region. The Council **reiterated its welcome** of the intent by Norway to host a meeting of Ministers of Environment in August 2001.

21. The Council **noted with satisfaction** the Action Plan on the development of the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area (BEATA) and the BEATA Backbone Network Scheme. The Council **underscored** the importance of identifying priorities and developing the BEATA backbone network. The Council **highly appreciated** the results of the First and Second International Eurasian Conferences on transport organized by the Russian Federation in cooperation with the EU. The creation of Eurasian transport links including those which go through the territory of the Barents area promotes its economic and social development.

22. The Council **encouraged** further exploration of practical ways for commercial use of the Northern Sea Route - an important transportation link between Europe and Asia through the Barents region. Such use should take place in a responsible and safe manner, not jeopardizing the fragile Arctic environment.

23. The Council **noted** progress in the implementation of the Exchange Programme for Higher Education and Research. The Council **stressed** the importance of efforts to disseminate information about the Programme's achievements and to widen the scope of actors in the field of education. The Council **noted with satisfaction** the efforts being made to provide information about national and multinational funding schemes to increase the mobility of students, researchers and teachers in the region. The Council **underscored** the importance of broader use of information technology in the field of education, i.a. through the Arctic University and the Barents Virtual University.

24. The Council **noted with satisfaction** the continuity and further development of cooperation in the youth field. The Council **welcomed** the strengthening of contacts between the Barents Regional Youth Forum and the Ad hoc Working Group on Youth Policy as one of the positive developments in this respect. The



Council **urged** the EU to consider amending its youth programmes rules to ensure Russia's participation in the projects. The Council **expressed expectation** that the Conference of Ministers responsible for youth policy to be held in Tromsø, Norway, on 14-16 May 2001 will formulate additional principles for regional cooperation in the field of youth policy and suggest concrete actions in this field.

25. The Council **noted with satisfaction** the serious efforts that are being made in combating tuberculosis, especially in its multidrugresistant form, in the region, and **emphasized** the importance to continue this work under the umbrella of the "Health Cooperation Programme in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region 1999 - 2002". The Council **stressed** the need to continue combating sexually transmitted diseases and problems related to antibiotics resistance in the region. The Council **expressed deep concern** about the increase of HIV/AIDS cases in the region. This problem is closely intertwined with the increasing number of drug addicts. The Council **expressed concern** with the growth of these infections within the penitentiary system. The Council also **noted the importance** of fighting against alcohol abuse, in particular with reference to young people. The Council **resolved** that in the nearest future a decision will be made on whether a new Barents Health Programme should be launched for the period 2003-2006. The Council **noted with appreciation** that a uniform database containing information and a registry of the ongoing health projects in the Barents region has been developed and is continually being updated. The Council also **stressed the importance** to continue efforts in combating children's diseases and supporting aged invalids.

26. The Council **stressed** the significant role of the Barents Regional Council for effective and multi-faceted cooperation in the region and **underlined** the merits of cooperation at subnational level for addressing various challenges facing the Barents Region. The Council **noted with satisfaction** the Programme for Indigenous Peoples 2000-2003 adopted by the Regional Council. The Council **emphasized** the

importance of protecting and developing the indigenous peoples' language, cultures, businesses and societies in the region. Priority needs to be given to projects in these areas. The Council **recalled** the adoption of the Barents Programme 2000-2003 by the Regional Council. The Council **noted with satisfaction** the initiatives implemented by the Regional Council during the first year of the Programme. The Council also **recalled** the intention of the Barents Regional Council to contribute to the Action Plan on the Northern Dimension. The Council **underlined the importance** of better coordination between different programmes, and **especially highlighted** the need for a higher degree of integration between the Barents Programme and the Action Plan. The Council **highly appreciated** the Regional Council's efforts in building a strong people-to-people cooperation. The Council **noted with satisfaction** the important role that cultural and youth cooperation play in this connection. The Council **noted with appreciation** the work done by the Barents Church Council.

27. The Council **urged** the Committee of Senior Officials to address the need for easier access to comprehensive information on developments and cooperative projects in the Barents region.

### **III. The next session of the Council.**

The Chairmanship of the Council was assumed by Sweden. The Council **accepted** the kind invitation by the Government of Sweden to host the next session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in Sweden, at a time and place to be decided upon.