

JOINT COMMUNIQUE
Sixth Session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council
Bodo, Norway
4-5 March 1999

Ministers and senior representatives from the Member States, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation and Sweden, participated in the meeting, which was also attended by the European Commission.

Participants included, Ministers and other senior representatives from Observer States; Canada, France, the Federal Republic of Germany/presidency of the European Union, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America;

Governors or representatives from the Barents Region and a representative of the Indigenous People of the Region;

and representatives from the Arctic Council member states, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Council of Baltic Sea States, the Nordic Environmental Finance Corporation, the United Nations' Development Programme and the Contact Expert Group under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

I. Introduction

The Council affirmed the continuing validity of the principles and aims of the 1993 Kirkenes and 1998 Lulee Declarations. Our vision is a region characterized by stability, prosperity, progress and sustainable development. This vision is being realized through strategies for health and environmental protection, economic development, cultural development and education; and democracy. The Council heard reports and made recommendations on items under those strategies.

The Council noted the significance of Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation as an integral part of efforts aimed at creating a stable, democratic and prosperous Europe. The effective and multi-faceted cooperation in the Region constitutes an important element in the European security architecture.

The Council also welcomed the increasing number of confidence enhancing bilateral contacts between military institutions in the Region.

The development of the concept of the Northern Dimension is followed with great interest. It has led to an increased focus by the European Union on the Barents Euro-Arctic area and underlines the need for better coordination between various regional cooperation frameworks. In the EU policy towards the Barents Euro-Arctic region Tacis, which addresses topics such as nuclear safety, energy efficiency, the environment and cross-border cooperation, is an important element.

The Council discussed the challenges facing the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and underlined the need for further international cooperation to meet them. The Council approved a Health Cooperation Programme for the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and an Exchange Programme for Higher Education and Research.

The Council endorsed a document on "How to intensify Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation", prepared by Senior Officials, containing recommendations for future work.

The Communiqué of the Ministerial Conference on cultural cooperation in the Barents,-Euro Arctic Region, as well as reports from the Environment Task Force, the ad, hoc Working Group on Energy, the Working Group on Economic Cooperation and the Working Group on the Northern Sea Route were presented to the Council. Also presented were a report on " How to promote Trade and Investments in the Barents Region" and a report from the Contact Expert Group under the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The Council noted the continued commitment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region states to assist indigenous people in creating favourable conditions for the preservation and development of their languages, culture, economic activities and social life.

The Council expressed appreciation for the work undertaken to establish a new overall Programme for the Indigenous People of the Barents Region.

The Council noted that youth cooperation would play an important part in fostering people-to people contacts, that such contacts have an important role in Barents cooperation, and that the Regional Council would give greater emphasis to youth policy.

The Council decided to include youth policy as one of its development areas.

The Council noted the transition of the chairmanship of the Regional Council from Lapland to Murmansk, and acknowledged the vital role the Regional Council plays in reflecting the concerns of people living in the Barents Region and in contributing to further development of cooperation. Finland is now represented in the Regional Council by the councils of Kainuu, Lapland and North Ostrobothnia.

The Council welcomed the growing involvement of observer states in the cooperation.

Appropriate consideration will be given to the European Union's competence in relevant areas.

II. Further Cooperation.

Sustainable development.

The Council underlined the importance of pursuing sustainable development in the Barents Region by implementing Agenda 21.

The Council supported the initiative of the Regional Council to develop Local Agenda 21 Action Programmes in the Region, in cooperation with the relevant local and central organizations, taking into account the needs and the potentials of the local communities. To this end, the Council also recommended close cooperation with the indigenous people's organizations.

1. Health and environmental protection.

Health cooperation programme.

Recognizing the interest of everyone in reducing differences in health standards between parts of the Barents Region thus contributing to the creation of sustainable development, the Council adopted a Health Cooperation Programme for the Barents region for the years 1999 – 2002.

Major areas of cooperation under the Programme are:

1. Combating new and re-emerging infectious diseases.
2. Supporting reproductive health care and child health care.
3. Counteracting life style related health problems
4. Improving services for indigenous people.
5. Quality improvement of medical services.

Environment

The Council recalled the 1994, 1995 and 1997 Declarations by Barents Ministers of the Environment amounting to a comprehensive Environment Action Programme with clear directions and recommendations relating to cooperation on prevention of radioactive pollution, environmental management and capacity building, reduction of pollution from industrial activities, protection of biodiversity, cooperation between local and regional authorities, integration of environmental concerns into economic activities and financing of environmental tasks.

The Council reiterated the importance of these recommendations and requested the Ministers of the Environment to review and report to the Council on the progress made in the implementation of the Environment Action Programme and of the projects jointly selected by the Working Group on Economic Cooperation and the Environment Task Force for their economic and environmental benefits.

The Council encouraged Ministers of the Environment to actively support the efforts of the European Union to further develop environmental protection in the region. It further reiterated the need to integrate the environmental dimension into all economic activities in the region and to further develop environmental guidelines for the effective conservation and sustainable utilisation of natural resources as well as for the prevention of pollution at source.

Nuclear safety, safety of spent fuel and nuclear waste management.

The Council discussed matters related to nuclear and radiation safety, radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel management with particular reference to the Russian part of the Barents region. It was noted that a number of positive steps had been made in this field, but there is a need to reach breakthroughs.

The Council expressed its appreciation of ongoing international project cooperation in the Russian Federation in the field of nuclear safety and radioactive waste management. It commended the work of the Contact Expert Group (CEG) under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to encourage the Russian Federation to further develop and present its policy in this field. The Council encouraged

the CEG to work out a more comprehensive plan for foreign project involvement in order to speed up the implementation of high priority projects in the Russian Federation.

The Council recommended coordination of efforts to upgrade the safety of the Kola and Leningrad nuclear power plants, in the spirit of the agreement between EBRD/NSA and the Russian Federation, and encouraged enhancement of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste management in the Russian Federation.

Member countries and participants of the Council meeting signed a Declaration of Principles regarding a Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme in the Russian Federation (MNEPR).

The Council expressed appreciation for the efforts undertaken by the Russian Federation to solve the problem of radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel management in accordance with the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management. It believes that some additional industrial and related infrastructure, including safe interim radioactive waste storage, for the management of radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel in the Murmansk and Arkhangelsk regions is required and that it should be regarded as one of the priority areas for international cooperation.

The Council would welcome both cooperation with the Arctic Council and other organizations and technical assistance for surveillance programmes on radioactivity and other pollutants in the Arctic marine environment. Such monitoring programmes would regularly give information on the status of the marine environment and would form a basis for future strategies to prevent pollution to the marine environment from human activities.

2. Economic development

Economic Cooperation.

The Council encouraged the Working Group on Economic Cooperation to pursue its diversified approach to barriers to trade and investments with the view to improving the climate for economic cooperation in the Region. A few positive signs of improvements were noted with satisfaction, but there is still a lot to do before a satisfactory framework for trade and investments in the Region has been created. The Working Group should continue its efforts to improve the general conditions for cross-border trade, and national authorities of the member states should take into account the prospects for increased trade and investments, and thus improved welfare.

The Council welcomed the report by the ad hoc task force on trade and investment barriers and expressed the hope that concrete barriers would be removed. The Council noted that a forceful follow up of the recommendations from the task force would contribute significantly to the reduction of barriers.

As to the list of cooperation projects presented by the Working Group on Economic cooperation, there is a great variety as to level of implementation. Several projects are in different stages of realization with notable progress in energy efficiency and transport, while many other projects seem to need reconsideration.

The council recalled that the steady increase, of the trade of the region since 1993 had been interrupted last year due to economic difficulties and expressed the conviction that growth would soon resume.

The recent steps taken within the field of legislation e.g. regional initiatives for laws on the protection of investments by the Murmansk and Arkhangelsk Oblasts, the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and the Republic of Karelia, and the recently adopted legislation on Production Sharing Agreements in the petroleum sector in the Russian Federation, give reason for optimism for the coming year, provided that the above mentioned legislation and similar measures are in fact implemented. In addition to the legal framework an adequate and cost effective transport infrastructure is a prerequisite for developing economically viable projects as well as reaching the objectives of regional development.

The opening of a new industrial and technology centre in Murmansk could contribute significantly to the establishment of improved facilities for business and economic development.

Cooperation in the field of energy.

The Council recalled that an Action Plan for the Improvement of the Energy Situation in the Barents Region was adopted by the Council at its fifth meeting.

On the same occasion the Council also decided to establish an ad hoc Working Group on Energy to promote the implementation of the Energy Action Plan.

The Council took note of the report by the ad hoc Working Group on its priorities and current activities regarding the establishment of Regional Barents Energy Focal Points, promotion of energy project financing and development of information networks.

The Council emphasised the importance of improving the energy situation in the Barents Region and noted with satisfaction that major steps have been taken in implementing the Energy Action Plan. The Council supported the priorities of the ad hoc Working Group and underlined the importance of progress in its work with

- Continued promotion of framework improvement, including more efficient information and communication systems.
- Intensified efforts to catalyse the implementation of selected projects which are judged to be feasible and represent technical and institutional values to be demonstrated.
- Coordination with and utilisation of lessons learned from the Baltic Sea Energy cooperation, the Baltic Energy Task Force and coordination between the ad hoc Working Group on Energy and the Environment Task Force aiming at implementing energy efficiency and energy saving projects.

Transport.

Recalling the Statement made by the Ministers of Transport of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region in Arkhangelsk in September 1996, the Council noted progress as the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area, endorsed by the Third Pan-European Transport Conference in Helsinki in 1997, has been established, encompassing border crossings and customs

cooperation, maintenance, upgrading and construction of new transport infrastructure, including ancillary facilities

The Council welcomed the memorandum of understanding on the Development of the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area signed in Copenhagen on 26 May 1998 by the Ministers of Transport, Railways and Communication from Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and by the representative of the Commission of the European Communities. The first meeting of the Steering Committee, established in accordance with the Memorandum, took place on 7-8 December 1998 in Oslo.

The Council encouraged the Steering Committee to coordinate and monitor the progress of activities and speed up efforts to implement its Action Programme including the establishment of the Backbone Network of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

In this context the Council noted the relevance of European Union programmes aimed at assisting structural investments, particularly in the transport area.

The Council noted the significant improvement of the road connection with Murmansk represented by the opening of the Nikel-Lotta road segment in October 1998.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council's Working Group on the Northern Sea Route has actively studied possibilities of the use of the Northern Sea Route for the purposes of international navigation and discussed at its meetings the results of the implementation of the international exploratory programmes.

Tourism and ecotourism.

Realizing that assets in the form of unspoiled nature and existing infrastructure in the Barents Region have a potential for generating culturally oriented tourism and ecotourism, the Council noted the Regional Council's efforts to develop such tourism. It also took note of other initiatives aiming at the same goals.

3. Cultural development and education.

The Council noted with satisfaction the statement made at the Ministerial conference on cultural cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region on 10 September 1998 in Arkhangelsk, and reiterated the increasing importance of cultural cooperation as a means for promoting cultural contacts and cultural exchange in the Barents Region. The Council underlined the importance of cooperation on concrete projects, inter alia, for the preservation of the region's cultural heritage.

Exchange programmes in the field of higher education and scientific research in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation, and Sweden will increase and coordinate exchange within the fields of science and higher education in the Barents region. Financial contributions as well as efforts to make existing exchange measures between the countries involved more beneficial to the Barents region will contribute to this goal.

The council was presented with and accepted a programme document that outlines in further detail the policies to pursue this field.

Observing that means to support student mobility project under the EU Tempus programme are available to all the countries in the Region, the Council noted that increased language, educational and scientific training in the Barents Region would contribute to the development of contacts across borders.

4. Democracy.

In recent years the number of people-to-people contacts across borders in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region have multiplied. Agreements on cooperation have been signed between regional entities. Twinning arrangements between cities and local communities have been established. Non-governmental organizations and other private entities have also increased their cross-border contacts. The Council expressed its satisfaction over these developments, and underlined the desirability to expand such contacts further.

The Council underlined the need for continued efforts aimed at bolstering democratic institutions and recognized in this regard the importance of projects relating to the further development of civil society.

The Council commended the ongoing efforts by relevant organizations participating in projects aimed at enhancing organizational skills and cross-sector cooperation between actors in business and labour organizations. Such efforts include i.a. ongoing projects in Murmansk involving employers' organisations and trade unions and aiming at developing efficient and constructive workplace relations between employers and employed.

The Council requested the CSO to consider the establishment of a new ad hoc working group on youth cooperation supplementing the work in this field undertaken by the Regional Council and others and report to the Council on progress.

The Council welcomed the decision by Finland to organize a conference on the Barents cooperation in the youth field in Rovaniemi during the concurring Finnish Chairmanship of the Barents Council and Presidency of the European Union this year. A preparatory event at regional level will be organized by Vdsterbotten in cooperation with the Finnish organizing committee.

The Council stated the importance of gender perspectives in all activities.

Meetings of parliamentarians and politicians would increase political focus on the Barents cooperation. The Council expressed satisfaction that the Norwegian Parliament and the Nordic Council are extending invitations to a meeting of parliamentarians in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region in Alta on 8-9 April this year.

III The Seventh Session of the Council.

The Council accepted the kind invitation by the Government of Finland to host the next session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in Finland at a time and place to be decided on.