

JOINT STATEMENT BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC COUNCIL

SECOND SESSION

14th-15th SEPTEMBER 1994

TROMSO, NORWAY

A. INTRODUCTION

At the invitation of the Norwegian Foreign Minister, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs or representatives of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the European Commission met in Tromso, Norway on 14-15 September 1994 for the Second Session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. The meeting was also attended by observers from Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as by the, Regional Council of the Barents Euro-Arctic region, and by representatives of the indigenous people of the region.

The Council reaffirmed its view that the Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation should contribute to peace and stability, sustainable development and prosperity in the region and Europe as a whole. The Council noted that the Barents Cooperation formed part of the emerging Europe of the Regions transversing the former East West divide and spanning regions from the Black Sea to the Barents Sea.

The Council noted the progress achieved in the cooperation between the states in the region at the national, regional and local levels since the first and founding session of the Council in Kirkenes 11 January 1993. The Council expressed its conviction that the rapid increase in trans-border contacts in a variety of fields ranging from culture to economic cooperation and political dialogue on a broad range of subjects confirmed the timeliness of the Barents cooperation initiative and promised well for the future development of the cooperation.

The Council expressed its strong support for the broad range of activities initiated by the Regional Council and reaffirmed its view that the region itself must play a leading role in advancing the cooperation. The Council emphasized the importance of concentrating on concrete projects, i.a. within the framework of the Barents Regional Programme and other appropriate national and international projects.

The Council welcomed the recent decision by the Nordic Council of Ministers to include, i.a., the Russian part of the Barents region in its working programme for regions adjacent to the Nordic area. The Council noted that access to Nordic funds, exchange programmes and scholarship arrangements will open new possibilities for further developing the Barents cooperation.

The Council expressed its conviction that the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the Russian Federation and the European Communities and the accession of Finland, Norway and Sweden to the European Union would have a positive effect on economic development and social welfare in the Barents region and serve to strengthen the dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and Russia. The Council also expressed the view that the new partnership agreement and the enlargement of the European Union should encourage greater European participation in meeting the challenges of the Barents Region, e.g. in fields such as environment and infrastructure.

The Council welcomed the Norwegian initiative to organize a conference on the implications for the Barents region and the Barents cooperation of the accession of

Norway, Sweden and Finland to the European Union, scheduled to be held in Kirkenes, Norway on 26-27 October 1994.

B. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Council had a joint meeting with the Regional Council where it heard a report on the activities of the Regional Council by its chairman and discussed related issues with its members. The Council expresses its full satisfaction with the work of the Regional Council and its plans for future activities.

The Council attached particular importance to the Barents Programme of priority projects adopted by the Regional Council. The Council recognized the considerable efforts made by the Regional Council and its working groups to formulate strategies on a variety of areas and assemble them into a full-fledged scheme. The Programme proposals should be taken under consideration and be compared and coordinated with ongoing and planned national, bilateral and multilateral activities with a view to speedy implementation. The Council recognized that the financing would be a key issue in fulfilling the programme and called for intensified efforts at the regional, national and international level to secure adequate project financing.

The Council welcomed the Republic of Karelia as a member of the Regional Council.

The Council noted with satisfaction the establishment of a Finnish Consular Mission in Murmansk, a Russian Consulate General in Kirkenes with visa issuing authority for the Nordic part of the Barents Region, and a Norwegian Consulate General in Murmansk empowered to handle visa applications to Sweden as well.

C. HUMAN CONTACTS AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

The Council noted with satisfaction the results of the first conference of the ministers of Culture of the Barents region, held in Kirkenes, Norway on 31 August to 1 September 1993 and expressed its hope and intention of extending and reinforcing the cultural cooperation within the region, bearing in mind the fundamental importance of human contacts, sports and cultural exchange for overall development of cooperation in the region.

The Council expressed its support for the Ministers of Culture's declared goal of

- strengthening the role of educational and scientific institutions within the cultural cooperation,
- preserving the cultural heritage and -important monuments and objects, and through cooperation prevent the destruction of common and irreplaceable values,
- promoting further cultural cooperation among the indigenous peoples of the Barents region,
- having projects initiated in the region and managed by or in close cooperation with regional cultural authorities,
- having relevant national authorities contributing in creating conditions enabling regional cultural cooperation to take place.

The Council assigned high priority to the further stimulation of cultural interchange in the

Region an essential element in the building of a regional identity and noted with satisfaction that, Barents culture festivals and related activities had been arranged in all the participating regions.

D. INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The Council reaffirmed its commitment to the rights of the indigenous people in the North in keeping with the objectives set out in Chapter 26 on Indigenous People of Agenda 21, and its commitment to strengthen the indigenous communities of the region, and to ensure that the cooperation will take the interests of indigenous people into consideration.

The Council emphasized the importance of ensuring full participation by indigenous people in the Barents Cooperation and full integration of indigenous issues in the relevant working bodies. In this context the Council underlined the importance of the direct indigenous representation in the Regional Council and welcomed the expanded indigenous participation in the Council's working groups. The Council further welcomed the contribution by the working group on indigenous issues to the Barents Programme.

The Council welcomed the proposed establishment of a permanent Regional Committee for the Indigenous People in the Barents Euro-Arctic region, and expressed the hope that the Committee would contribute to ensure broad consideration of indigenous issues in all aspects of the Barents Cooperation and to facilitate active indigenous participation in the work of the Regional Council. The Council agreed to give the Regional Committee for the Indigenous People a special advisory role in relation to the Barents Council.

The Council noted with satisfaction that the first conference of indigenous people of the Barents region was held in Bodo on 16 and 17 June 1994 with participation of Sami from Norway, Sweden, and Finland and Sami and Nentsy from Russia. The Council expressed the view that the Conference and similar initiatives in the future would serve to strengthen contacts and cooperation among the indigenous people in the Barents Region and raise the profile of indigenous people in the overall Barents cooperation.

The Council further welcomed the Danish initiative to establish an Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat in Copenhagen within the framework of the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy (AEPS).

E. THE ENVIRONMENT

The Council noted with satisfaction the results of the First Meeting of Environment Ministers of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, held in Bodo, Norway on 15 June 1994, and reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening environmental cooperation in the European Arctic with the objective of complementing and implementing, on a regional basis, the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy ("the Rovanelmi process").

The Council expressed its support for the main goals of the Environment Ministers as reflected in the adopted Barents Region Environment Action Programme in order to protect the environment and promote sustainable development in the region, and took note of the specific objectives of the Action Programme

- to prevent radioactive pollution and oil pollution and to strengthen preparedness against nuclear and oil pollution accidents,

- to reduce harmful emissions from existing local industries and other activities which have serious regional or transboundary environmental effects,
- to prevent environmental problems in the region by applying environmental impact assessments available to the public, both in a domestic and transboundary context,
- to maintain the biodiversity of the region and the natural quality of the pristine areas,
- to promote the implementation in the region of international environmental agreements and conventions,
- to assist local and regional authorities in their efforts to control the environmental problems of their parts of the region,
- to improve environmental monitoring and availability of environmental information in the region, i.a. as a basis for assessing the state of the environment and the effects of the measures undertaken,
- to safeguard the environmental quality of areas of special importance for the indigenous peoples.

The Council welcomed the decision by the Environment Ministers to establish a joint Task Force of experts to implement the goals of the Action Programme and further develop selected projects in priority areas with a view to present concrete proposals to the Second Meeting of Environment Ministers-of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.

The Council particularly emphasized the importance of the nuclear and radiation safety. The Task Force should in cooperation with relevant authorities urgently address the issue of safe management and storage of radioactive waste in the region.

The Council also noted with interest the initiative of the Russian Government to protect a 42.000 square kilometer area surrounding Franz-Josef Land, the largest protected area in the Barents region as well as in Europe, and the largest marine reserve in the Arctic.

F. ECONOMIC COOPERATION

The Council recognized that political developments in Europe have brought European countries closer together, and underlined that this process opens the way for initiatives to transform the Barents Region into an important area of sustainable economic growth through enhanced political and economic cooperation among the member states and the European Union.

The Council emphasized the importance of promoting economic cooperation in the Barents region and decided to establish a working group to study possibilities for and problems of economic cooperation and to identify areas, which can be improved by regional cooperation. The working group should i.a. discuss various ways and means to facilitate closer commercial cross-border cooperation and strengthen regional economic development, including i.a. promotion of industrial development and investments and increased scientific and technological cooperation. The Council instructed the CSO to determine a mandate for the Working Group, which could include preparations for a meeting at the ministerial level. The Council took note of the important work done by the ad hoc Working Group on Industrial and Economic Cooperation under the Regional

Council, and instructed the new working group to carry out its work in close consultation and cooperation with the regional level.

The Council welcomed the initiative of the Governments of Norway, Finland and Sweden to establish, together with the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development a Regional Venture Fund to stimulate investments in the Russian part of the Barents region by providing new equity capital and technical assistance to help small and medium sized privatized or private enterprises to restructure, modernize and expand their operations.

G. EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION

The Council welcomed the invitation of Finland to host a meeting of the Ministers of Education and Research. The Working Group, which is preparing the meeting, should compile information on existing cooperation on the local, regional and national levels to identify possible new cooperation initiatives

The Council welcomed the contacts and cooperation being, established among various research institutions in the region and expressed the wish that this cooperation must be strengthened through the development of networks within specific areas

The Council expressed its appreciation for the decision by the Nordic Council of Ministers to extend its scholarship programme to include the Barents region as from 1994.

H. REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The Council noted with satisfaction the results of the first conference of the ministers of Transport and Communications of the Barents region, held in Alta, Norway on 8 September 1993 and emphasized that an adequate infrastructure for transport and communications is an essential prerequisite for personal, cultural and commercial contacts and for a positive regional development. This particularly concerns the east-west lines of communication between the Russian and Nordic parts of the region.

The Council emphasized the importance of analyzing future transport demands in different parts of the region to provide an adequate empirical basis for infrastructure decisions.

The Council took note of the decision by the Ministers of Transport and Communications to give priority to three relevant transport corridors to provide a basis for national decisions as regards improvement of the infrastructure for land-based transport in the region: the two east-west corridors Murmansk/Archangel - Kandalaksha - Salia - Haparanda - Narvik and Murmansk - Nikel - Boris Gleb/Storskog - Kirkenes, as well as the north-south corridor Ivalo - Nikel/Pechenga - Kirkenes (on the Norwegian and/or Russian side of the Pasvik valley).

In this context the Council welcomed the Russian plans to construct, in cooperation with Norway, a new, alternative southern road linking Kirkenes and Murmansk. It expressed the hope that the new road would ameliorate the current travel restrictions on the northern road pending their complete removal.

The Council pointed out that facilitating border and customs procedures would present a significant improvement for the regional transport possibilities.

The Council expressed satisfaction with the extensive involvement of Norwegian and Finnish telecommunications companies in cooperation with Russian telephone companies in improving the fixed and mobile networks in northwestern Russia, and expressed hope that the cooperation would eventually result in a well-developed telecommunications network, based on international standards, within and between all parts of the region.

The Council welcomed the decision by the Transport and Communications ministers to establish a high-level group of senior officials to meet on an ad-hoc basis to exchange mutual information about the status of infrastructure development for transport and communications in the region. The Council expressed its hope that this would ensure greater coordination among national infrastructure development plans.

THE NORTHERN SEA ROUTE

The Council noted that a working group on the Northern Sea Route had been established under the auspices of the CSO. The Council also noted with satisfaction that on 1 June 1993 research institutions in Norway, Japan and Russia had started the five-year multi-disciplinary and multilateral International Northern Sea route Programme (INSROP), and acknowledged its aim of building up a knowledge-base adequate to provide a foundation for long-term planning and decision-making by state agencies as well as private companies for the purpose of promoting the use of the Northern Sea Route for transit and regional development in northern Russia and neighboring countries. The Council recognized the value of INSROP, and directed the CSO to ensure maximum coordination with INSROP with a view to avoid duplication.

TOURISM

The Council noted with satisfaction that a significant increase in regional tourism had been observed. Such contacts represent an important element in the development of inter-human contacts and understanding between the nations, as well as an element in the economic development of the region.

The Council also pointed out the necessity of improving the regional infrastructure, including cross border links, in order to facilitate the development of tourism in the region.

The Council underlined the need to take every possible precaution to avoid damages to the vulnerable Arctic habitat as a result of growing tourism.

HEALTH

The Council noted with satisfaction the results of the first conference of the ministers of Health of the Barents region, held in Bodo, Norway on 12-13 April 1994 and emphasized that the countries of the region share cultural, Geographic, demographic and climatic conditions that influence health and the provision of health services.

The Council expressed its support for the Ministers of Health's declared aims of

- improving the understanding of the health effects of living and working in Arctic climatic and geographic circumstances,

- monitoring health effects of working in Arctic climatic conditions, of industrial pollution, radioactive waste and nuclear installations, and identifying possible interventions to alleviate adverse effects,
- improving the comparability of epidemiological studies and health statistics, and promoting the exchange of medical statistics and the rapid exchange of information on communicable diseases,
- identifying the measures required to facilitate adequate preventive activities and health services to the indigenous peoples of the region in close collaboration with these peoples and taking into account their knowledge and experience in coping with Arctic conditions, developing methods and models of primary health care appropriate to the region, including habilitation, rehabilitation, dental care and health promotion and disease prevention,
- improving the quality of hospital-based services and medical technology in the region, cooperating on medical emergency preparedness for natural and manmade disasters in the Barents region,
- assessing needs for the supply and distribution of essential drugs, vaccines and medical equipment to all levels of the health care sector in the region.

The Council emphasized the importance of an active follow-up of the ministerial conference and welcomed the elaboration of an action plan by the Regional Working Group on Health.

The Council welcomed the initiative for continued cooperation between the health authorities, exchange programmes for staff from the various levels and professions working in health promotion, health administration and health care, exchange programmes for students of various professions in the health sector, and joint research and studies in areas of mutual interest. In this context the Council noted with satisfaction the recently signed agreement of cooperation between the Regional Hospital of Tromsø, the Medical Faculty of the University of Tromsø, the Health Care Administration of Archangel Oblast and the Archangel State Medical Institute.

DATE AND VENUE OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE BARENTS COUNCIL

The Council accepted the kind invitation of the Government of Finland to host the next session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 1995, at a date to be decided upon.