



JOINT STATEMENT

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council convened its Seventh Session in Oulu on 14-15 March 2000 under the chairmanship of Finland.

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 European Commission and Portugal/Presidency of the European Union together with:

senior representatives from the Observer States (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, 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, the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, the Nordic Environmental Finance Corporation, the Northern Forum and the Contact Experts Group under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

I

1. The Council *recalled* the significant role of regional cooperation according to the principles and objectives of the Kirkenes Declaration, signed in January 1993, for strengthening peace and stability as well as promoting sustainable development and prosperity in the Barents region. The Council *confirmed* that regional cooperation is an important factor in promoting pan-European cooperation and security and *welcomed* the adoption by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) of the document of major importance, namely the "Charter on European Security".

2. The Council *considered* that disparity in living conditions and development prospects among the countries of the region needs to be substantially narrowed and *reaffirmed* its strong commitment to further promote Barents cooperation in the fields of economy, energy, transport, environment, health, education and research and to encourage people-to-people contacts and cultural relations and the well-being of the peoples of the region.

3. 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 many of the challenges facing the Barents region. The

Council *noted with satisfaction* the successful implementation of the Barents Programme 1997-1999.

4. The Council *favourably considered* the political steps called for in the Communiqué adopted at the "Conference of Parliamentarians in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region" in Alta in April 1999.

5. The Council *encouraged* further contacts and efforts in the Barents region aimed at increasing confidence and enhancing all forms of security.

6. The Council *welcomed* the contribution of the parties who have assisted Russia in the development and implementation of projects in the field of nuclear and radioactive safety, inter alia the construction of storage facilities for liquid radioactive waste, the construction of special railroad freight wagons for transportation of spent nuclear fuel and projects enhancing the safety of nuclear power stations in north-west Russia. The Council *noted* that work is ongoing on the development of a comprehensive plan in cooperation with the Contact Experts Group for high priority projects in Russia.

The Council *highly appreciated* the commitment by its members, the European Commission and other participating states to renew their efforts to bring the negotiations on the agreement for the Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme for Russia (MNEPR) to a successful conclusion and *underlined* its seriousness and importance for ongoing international efforts in this field. The parties look forward to a meeting of experts in May 2000 in Moscow with the intent to bring these negotiations to a conclusion so that these efforts of the international community may be fostered and enhanced.

7. The Council *noted* the adoption of the EU Common Strategy for Russia, in June 1999, and the Russian mid-term Strategy for EU-relations, in October 1999, and *reaffirmed* that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the Russian Federation together with these strategies provide a good basis for improved regional cooperation in northern Europe.

8. The Council *took note* of the Conclusions of the Chair at the Foreign Ministers' Conference on the Northern Dimension, in November 1999, and *underlined* their status as a common political platform for future cooperation between the EU, its member states and partner countries in the European North. The Council *noted* the invitation by the European Council in Helsinki, in December 1999, to the European Commission to prepare a Northern Dimension Action Plan, consulting also the partner countries during the preparatory process. The Council *expressed* its intention to assume an active role in the further development and implementation of the Action Plan on the Northern Dimension.

9. The Council *noted with appreciation* the statement by the Barents Regional Council expressing the latter's intention to contribute to the Action Plan on the Northern Dimension at the appropriate stage. The Council *encouraged* subnational cooperation structures to participate actively in the implementation of the Northern Dimension.

10. The Council *was encouraged* by the smooth cooperation among its members and Canada and the United States, in the Arctic Council, and the evolving cooperation on

northern issues between the EU and its transatlantic partners in the context of the Northern Dimension Policies for the EU, the Northern Europe Initiative of the USA and the Northern Dimension of Canada's Foreign Policy.

11. The Council *noted with satisfaction* the results of the Interreg programmes implemented at subnational level during the period of 1995-1999. These cooperation frameworks and instruments have increased people-to-people contacts and provided valuable experience in overcoming challenges caused by vast distances and communication difficulties. The Council *appreciated* the continued commitment of the Barents Regional Council, in accordance with its competence, to enhance cross-border and transnational cooperation by supporting further development of technical procedures and promoting Interreg activities in the period 2000-2006.

12. The Council *noted* that bilateral and EU instruments provide valuable financial and technical support for regional co-operation. The Council *welcomed* the efforts to enhance the effectiveness and transparency of Tacis, Interreg and other relevant programmes. The Council *underlined* the importance of improved coordination between bilateral and multilateral instruments and programmes.

13. The Council *appreciated* the experience of joint financing of activities for example the Barents Forest Sector Initiative, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Energy and the Task Force II on trade barriers. The Council *encouraged* the use of similar formulas for the future and *welcomed* the cooperation between different Working Groups and Task Forces.

II

14. The Council *endorsed* the activities of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation, namely the investment project work, the forest sector initiative and the work carried out to diminish barriers in border crossing and trade.

15. The Council *noted with satisfaction* the development of the Barents Forest Sector Initiative in focusing attention on the challenges of the forest sector. The encouraging results of the Petrozavodsk Expert Seminar in October 1999, reflected in the recommendations of the Resolution and the Final Report, emphasise the need for action in this field. The Council *expressed* the wish that the importance of further development of the forest sector would be appropriately reflected in the action plan for the Northern Dimension within the policies of the European Union. The Council *welcomed* the decision by the Committee of Senior Officials to establish a task force under the Working Group on Economic Cooperation to promote Barents Region forest sector cooperation and to address problems related to forests, forest ecosystems and their biodiversity as well as forest legislation and regulations.

16. The Council *welcomed* the work carried out by Task Force II on trade barriers. The Council *highlighted* the concrete achievements made in cooperation among customs authorities and stressed the need for continued work in this important area. The Council *noted with satisfaction* the continuation of the mandate of Task Force II, based on the

approved work plan and jointly financed budget as decided by the Working Group on Economic Cooperation.

17. The Council *considered* that the investment project work had enhanced knowledge about the investment climate and policies in the Russian parts of the region and had contributed to promote investment projects. The Council *looked forward* to receiving in autumn 2000 the final report of the comparative study on investment climate. Progress made in the construction of new border stations on the Russian side at Alakurtti/Salla and Boris Gleb/Storskog border-crossing points was *noted with satisfaction*.

18. The Council *noted with satisfaction* the increased attention given to activities at local and regional level in the environmental field. The Council *emphasised* focus on people-to-people cooperation in order to promote environmental commitment and integration of environmental concerns in the work of other sectors, such as energy, economy and health. The Council also emphasized the need to follow-up the investment projects identified in the NEFCO/AMAP report. This work should take into due account the ongoing and planned activities of the Barents Regional Council concerning the development of Local Agenda 21. Areas of particular concern are follow-up of the project preparation activities, cleaner production, cultural heritage, protection of natural habitats and conservation of biological diversity as well as institution building and public participation. Special attention should be given to the indigenous peoples of the region. The Council also *welcomed* the intention of Norway to host a Meeting of Ministers of Environment in August 2001.

19. The Council *endorsed* the ongoing work to improve the energy situation in the Barents region. Joint efforts to support the work of the regional energy centres, "Barents Energy Focal Points", to promote energy project financing and to establish an information network have enhanced the capacity to plan financially feasible projects, especially investment projects in energy efficiency and conversion to local fuels in heat and electricity production. The Council *recommended* further efforts to develop the established network and to promote the implementation of well-prepared investment projects together with relevant financing institutions and energy sector actors. The Council *emphasised* the importance of active cooperation with the Baltic Sea Group of Senior Energy Officials in order to ensure that issues of importance to the Barents region are addressed by that group and in the Northern Dimension process.

20. The Council *noted with satisfaction* that the Steering Committee on the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area had approved the Action Programme for 1999-2003. The Council *endorsed* the establishment of a backbone network for the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area, defining the major transnational air, road, rail and sea transport routes as well as the sea port and airport nodes in the region. The relevant data on the backbone network has been collected in a database. The Council also *welcomed* the intention of the Russian Federation to organize a Meeting for Ministers of Transport in September 2000 in St. Petersburg in connection with the 2nd Euro-Asian Transport Conference. The importance of the development of prioritised projects of the backbone network was *stressed* by the Council.

21. The Council *noted with satisfaction* the intention to increase efforts in development of the northern sea route, in the light of the results of the International Northern Sea Route Programme (INSROP) and with due attention to environmental aspects.

22. The Council *stressed* the importance of support for co-operation in the field of youth and *considered* that the ongoing survey "Young People in the Barents Region" will assist in identifying issues of relevance to youth policy. The Council *noted with satisfaction* the important steps for youth cooperation in the Barents region and for its development taken at the Conference on Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation in the Youth Field in September 1999 and by the establishment of the Barents Regional Youth Forum. The Council *welcomed* the decision by the Committee of Senior Officials to prolong the mandate of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Youth Policy for two years and the intention of Norway to prepare a Conference in 2001 for Youth Ministers together with representatives of indigenous peoples and youth organisations.

23. The Council *recalled* its decision made in Bodö on implementing a programme for exchange of students and researchers and *noted with satisfaction* the new Internet site with a comprehensive information package on available national and multinational (EU and Nordic Council of Ministers) funding schemes to facilitate the mobility of students, teachers and researchers in the Barents region. The Internet site connects institutions of higher education and research and promotes network building in the region. The Council also *encouraged* the broader use of information technology in the education field, inter alia through virtual university initiatives such as the Arctic University.

24. The Council *expressed* deep concern about the increase in tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases and problems related to antibiotics resistance in the region and *resolved* to pay additional attention to these issues in the implementation of its "Health Cooperation Programme for the Barents Region for the years 1999-2002". The Council *welcomed* the efforts to develop a data base containing information and a register on the ongoing health projects in the Barents region.

25. The Council *stressed* the importance of cultural cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and *recalled* the principles stated in the Communiqué of the Ministerial Conference on Cultural Cooperation in Archangel 1998. The achievements of the Barents Regional Cultural Committee and its efforts to strengthen cultural exchange and activities also with other European areas were emphasised. The Council *welcomed* the ongoing evaluation of the past six years' cultural activities, including the preparations for an action plan.

26. The Council *noted with satisfaction* the adoption of the Barents Programme for 2000-2003 by the Regional Council in December 1999. The five priorities of the programme are: 1) development of industry and infrastructure, 2) competence building and education, 3) environment and health, 4) welfare and culture and 5) indigenous peoples. The Council *regarded* this programme as a valuable instrument for enhancing cooperation and *emphasised* that close coordination between the national and subnational level is needed for it to be effectively implemented.

27. The Council *underlined* the importance of the Action Plan in the "Programme for the Indigenous Peoples of the Barents Region for 2000-2003", drafted by the Working Group

of Indigenous Peoples, consisting of Sami, Nenets and Vepse peoples. The Council *fully supported* the efforts made by the Working Group to preserve and develop indigenous languages and cultures and to improve the living conditions of the indigenous peoples.

III

The Chairmanship of the Council was assumed by the Russian Federation. The Council *accepted* the invitation by the Government of the Russian Federation to host the next Ministerial Session in 2001, at a date and place to be decided upon.

The following documents were available at the Ministerial Session:

- Report by the Working Group on Economic Cooperation
- Report "Update on Project Development on Barents Region Investment Projects"
- Interim Report of the second phase of the investment project work (a comparative study of foreign investments in the Russian parts of the Barents Region)
- Report on the Forest Sector Initiative
- Report of Task Force II on border crossing
- Report by the ad hoc Working Group on Energy
- Report by the Steering Committee on Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area
- Report of the Environment Task Force to the Fourth Meeting of Environment Ministers of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Umeå, 10-11 June 1999
- Report of the ad hoc Working Group on Youth Policy
- Report of the Board for the Exchange Programme for Higher Education and Research in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region
- Report of the Reference Group on Health
- Barents Programme 2000-2003
- Report on the Status of the MNEPR-negotiations by the Chairman of the negotiations