



**JOINT STATEMENT OF THE BARENTS REGIONAL COUNCIL**  
**On the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BEAC**  
**3 June 2013, Kirkenes, Norway**

1. The Barents Regional Council (BRC), convened on 3 June, 2013, in Kirkenes, Norway under the chairmanship of the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten.
2. The BRC welcomes the new Kirkenes Declaration initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway, to be adopted by Prime Ministers and other high-level representatives of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, i.e. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the European Union, during the Barents Summit held in Kirkenes 3-4 June 2013.

The BRC notes with appreciation and welcomes the priorities set out in the new Kirkenes Declaration. The Declaration expresses a strong support for the regional cooperation which thus gives an opportunity for sustainable development of the regional cooperation in the long-term. The BRC has adopted a new regional cooperation programme, Barents Programme, for the period of 2014-2018

The Barents Programme will, during 2014-2018 aim at following:

- promote creative businesses and fast growing enterprises in the region,
- increase cross-border cooperation to achieve economies of scale and quality of life
- support joint management, as well as preservation, of natural resources,
- implement a joint climate change adaption,
- enhance innovation and research cooperation by increasing the critical mass,
- focus on missing cross-border links in the transport infrastructure,
- foster mobility across borders for workers, enterprises, tourists and students
- to focus on cultural cooperation in order to develop mutual understanding and regional development.

The Barents programme, and its aim and priorities are harmonious with the objectives of the Kirkenes Declaration 2013. Therefore, extensive cooperation between the regional and national levels can be continued.

In particular, the BRC wishes to highlight the following areas that require cooperation between the regional and national levels.

### **Border crossing**

3. The BRC stresses the need for continuous facilitation and simplification of the border crossing procedures. For a further development it is essential to bring about a more liberal and effective border crossing regime.

4. The BRC welcomes and strongly supports the Ministers intention to achieve a visa-free regime in the Barents region as an ultimate goal. In order to quicken the process, the BRC advocates the facilitation and simplification of visa procedures.

### **Transport and infrastructure development**

6. The development of East-West transport networks is an essential key factor to continue and bring further the economic and social development in the Barents Region. Therefore, the BRC encourages the work of drawing up a Joint Barents Transport Plan covering all transport modes and focusing on transport corridors between Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway. Particular attention should be paid to regional air services. This is important for business and private travel.

### **Investment and economic cooperation**

7. The Barents region is an expansive region of investments today, and preconditions for an increased economic cooperation are generated by investment programmes for the forthcoming years. The BRC thus emphasizes the importance of efforts leading to added value for the region. The BRC also stresses the importance to strengthen regional businesses through cross border cooperation in order to achieve economic growth and address the importance of a sustainable exploitation of the region's natural resources with respect to the environment, the climate and the people's livelihood.

### **Indigenous peoples**

8. The BRC underlines the importance of the indigenous peoples' role and participation in the Barents cooperation and recognizes the Nenets, Saami and Veps peoples' participation as individual observers in all BEAC and BRC bodies without formal invitation, and their right to participate in decision-making on matters affecting their rights.

### **Financing**

9. The Regional Council welcomes the proposal by the Russian Federation to initiate a financial instrument in the Barents region in order to attract partners and financial resources for development projects. A financial instrument would contribute to vitalizing the BRC politically and also strengthening its status as an arena for discussions of strategically important issues for the region. The funding system should be administrated by the International Barents Secretariat and the Committee of Senior Officials as a monitoring body. To obtain a strong regional impact funding decisions should be made by the Barents Regional Council. Proposals for decision-making should be made by the Barents Regional Committee and existing working groups.

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