



**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE BARENTS REGIONAL COUNCIL
AT THE BEAC 11TH SESSION**

15 November 2007, Rovaniemi

Members of the Barents Regional Council met in Rovaniemi 14 November 2007 for the 3rd meeting under the chairmanship of the Republic of Karelia. The Barents Euro-Arctic Council, chaired by Finland, and the Barents Regional Council, chaired by the Republic of Karelia, shared common goals and led Barents co-operation in the same direction during the period of our leadership. Our work reflected well the visions and aims of the Kirkenes declaration, as well as the main objectives of European Union (henceforth referred to as EU) –Russia Partnerships within the “road maps” on the four common spaces and the renewed Northern Dimension policy as a common policy between the EU, the Russian Federation, Norway and Iceland.

The Regional Council notes contribution that the Finnish chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council made to Barents co-operation. Thanks to the efforts of the Finnish chairmanship, as well as to the work of the regional ad-hoc group on organizational changes co-operation between the national and the regional levels of the BEAR has been increased and received a new dimension.

The Regional Council welcomes the establishment of the International Barents Secretariat (IBS) in Kirkenes which will strengthen the multilateral efforts of the Barents cooperation and enhance its practical content by better utilising available administrative and financial resources as well as promoting more effective co-ordination and implementation of the decisions of the BEAC and the BRC.

The Regional Council strongly supports the idea of the establishment of permanent national secretariats in every country in the Barents Region. National secretariats would help arrange better coordination and support common Barents activities nationally and internationally, act as links to the regions and take care of the information delivery effectively, serve as resource centers bringing regional priorities in conjunction with national and international policies, give advice to authorities and project managers cooperating in the region and promote Barents co-operation to people and institutions.

The Regional Council emphasizes the importance of sensible division of labour between the counties of Barents region according to their existing competence and commitment.

At present one of the most important goals for the future Barents co-operation is to secure sustainable economic growth through proper extraction and refinement of natural resources within the Barents region with focus on increased production of higher value added products in combination with ecological and social concern. The Regional Council supports further continuation of Barents Industrial Partnership meetings which serves as a good tool for increasing interaction between central and regional authorities, economic actors and other parties in key industrial sectors such as forestry, mining, metallurgy, oil and gas supplier industry.

Economic sector programmes became one of the key issues on the Committee and Council meetings agenda and “Barents 2010” project served a good basis for that. Six frame sector programmes have been launched: sector programme on forestry, sector programme on mining and minerals, sector programme on oil and gas, sector programme on tourism, sector programme on east-west logistics and sector programme on higher education. The Regional Council recognizes idea of project “Barents 2010+” as a necessary tool for result-oriented collaboration. Recognizing the importance for an overall vision to guide the activities conducted through the Barents cooperation, the Regional Council welcomes the initiative of a new Barents programme.

The Regional Council recognizes a high importance of a well-developed transport and logistics infrastructure and takes note of the contribution of BEATA working group to promoting multimodal transport corridors such as the Northern East-West Transport Corridor (N.E.W.) including the Barents Link concept and other potential transport connections in the Barents region, like railway link through Salla. The Barents Link can become an important “east-west” transportation corridor connected with adjacent side lines, ports and other transportation routes in and outside the region. The Regional Council welcomes the idea of establishment New Partnership on Transport and Logistics in the Framework of Northern Dimension.

The Regional Council welcomes the agreement between EU and Russia on simplification of visa issuing procedures and calls for further efforts on that matter for the whole Barents Region.

The Regional Council considers research and technological development as significant driving forces behind the growth initiatives and underlines universities and research centres as the key R&D nodes.

The Regional Council emphasizes the importance of environmental protection and stresses that special attention should be paid to climate change issues. The Barents Region is one of the few remaining areas with a relatively pristine natural environment: this implies a high quality of life, but it also entails a great responsibility for cleaner industrial production and increased environmental protection. The Regional Council is aware of the particular threat which the climate change presents to livelihood of the indigenous peoples.

The Regional Council prioritizes youth issues in Barents co-operation. This region is still young, but for demographic reasons, it is necessary to improve the conditions for young people’s influence, encourage multilateral cooperation between youth groups and improve opportunities for youth mobility. The adopted Barents Regional Youth Programme which has been developed in cooperation between the Regional Council, regional working group on

Youth Policy and the Barents Regional Youth Council is aimed at reaching an overall aim to make the Barents Region more attractive for young people so that they stay in the region or return after completing their education. It aims to contribute to the achievement of increased cross border youth cooperation within all areas in addition to development of skills and competencies, which promote active citizenship. The Regional Council calls for programme funding from all possible sources of financing.

The Regional Council notes the successful work on the establishment of the Joint Working Group on Culture, which provides possibilities for better synergy in cultural cooperation and accentuates the unique structure of the Barents cooperation.

The Regional Council underlines the importance of ongoing work within the Action Plan of Indigenous Peoples 2005-2008, which is intended to improve health and living conditions, to secure the rights of the Indigenous Peoples and to ensure cultural continuity of traditions in the future.

The Regional Council welcomes the development of the Parliamentary cooperation in the Barents region. The decision to provide the North-West Russian Parliamentary Association with the observer status to the Regional Council proved to be a justified and timely step. Opinion of the parliamentarians is now being taken into serious consideration providing for more efficient solutions.

The Regional Council strongly welcomes the inclusion of the Barents region as a priority area of the Northern Dimension policy. The Regional Council proceeds from the vision of Northern Dimension as collaboration between the regions aimed at sustainable development, stability, prosperity and security.

The Regional Council welcomes the development of ENPI CBC programmes. This will bring a radical simplification in procedures and substantial gains in efficiency. The Regional Council is convinced that the decision to make the whole Barents region eligible to participate in CBC programmes would strengthen funding opportunities and make it easier to develop multilateral projects in the region.

The Regional Council values the implementation of EU programmes in the region, notes the European Union's intention to continue to provide financing for cooperation programmes in Northern Europe. The Regional Council requests increased emphasis to be put on multilateral financing of programmes and activities, joint project preparation and monitoring. It is proposed that all projects executed in the whole Barents Region would take note of regional organizations which would act primarily as an opinion leader and leader in projects.

The Regional Council welcomes the development of cooperation between BEAC and the Nordic Council of Ministers and calls for strengthening collaboration between national and regional levels in the process of project selection.

The Regional Council thanks the Finnish chairmanship for productive co-operation and wishes the Russian chairmanship of BEAC all the best in the future work and is looking forward for efficient cooperation.