

XVI SESSION OF THE BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC COUNCIL
JOINT DECLARATION
Arkhangelsk, 18-19 October 2017

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) convened for its XVI Session under the chairmanship of Russia on 18-19 October 2017 in Arkhangelsk.

Foreign ministers and senior representatives of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the European Union participated together with representatives of the Barents Regional Council, indigenous peoples, regional bodies, observer states and invited guests.

Introduction

1. In view of the forthcoming 25th anniversary of the BEAC, the Council affirms the continuing validity of the principles and objectives of Barents cooperation, aiming at promoting stability, well-being and sustainable development in the Barents region as expressed in the Kirkenes Declaration of January 1993 and reaffirmed in the Summit Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation in Kirkenes in June 2013.

2. The Council recognizes the significant role of the Barents Regional Council (BRC) and notes that interregional cooperation and close interaction between national and regional levels are fundamental elements of Barents cooperation. The Council notes with appreciation the new Barents Programme 2019-2023, which provides the future focus points of interregional Barents cooperation.

3. The Council acknowledges the importance of the parliamentary dimension of Barents cooperation and takes note of the 8th Barents Parliamentary Conference held in June 2017 in Naryan-Mar, Russia.

4. The Council recognizes that a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions and respect for democratic values, non-discrimination, gender equality and the rights of indigenous peoples and other minorities, are prerequisites for dynamic, inclusive and sustainable regional development. The Council reaffirms the commitment of the BEAC member states to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and stresses the need for all working groups to take concrete action to this end.

5. The Council underlines the importance of civil society cooperation, cultural cooperation and people-to-people contacts, and supports active involvement of non-governmental organizations in relevant fields of Barents cooperation.

6. The Council welcomes the concrete steps taken particularly at working group level to enhance coherence and synergy of regional and cross-border cooperation between different forums, such as the Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Northern Dimension as well as the relevant financial programmes and calls for continued efforts to this end.

Economic cooperation, transport and logistics

7. The Council emphasizes the need for intensified economic and business cooperation in releasing the full economic potential of the Barents region, and underlines the importance of climate and environmental concerns and corporate social responsibility in all economic activities. The Council takes note of the annual Murmansk International Business week held within the framework of the Russian BEAC chairmanship in November 2015 and November 2016 as a platform to promote cross-border business cooperation and to elaborate joint approaches to the economic activities in the European North.

8. The Council recognizes the important role of cross-border transport connections for economic development and welcomes the Joint Declaration adopted at the BEAC Ministers of Transport Meeting, in June 2016 in Arkhangelsk, Russia, confirming the support to the continued work of the BEATA Steering Committee on elaborating the draft Joint Barents Transport Plan, development of synergy of transport and tourist sectors, cooperation in the field of intelligent transport systems and professional training for the transport industry in the Arctic region.

9. The Council recognizes the importance of improving planning and exchanging information between countries in the region regarding measures for cross-border infrastructure, to develop east-west and north-south railway and road connections and cargo transportation as well as high-speed data connections in the Barents region. The overall goal is safer and greener transports, technology development, and better cross-national information. The Council calls for continued coordination between BEATA and the existing transport networks and organizations with other regional formats, in particular, the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics.

10. The Council notes the future potential of the Northern Sea Route, which would benefit the Barents region and provide economic and business opportunities to the BEAC Member States, taking environmental aspects into account.

11. The Council calls for strengthened cooperation on renewable energy, energy efficiency and clean technologies in the Barents cooperation framework, as well as through partnerships between local authorities and the business sector.

12. The Council underlines the importance of cooperation on forest issues in the Barents region and acknowledges the role of the forest sector in climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as in the development of sustainable bioeconomy. The Council takes note of the recommendations from the Barents Forest Forum held in September 2017 in Arkhangelsk, Russia.

13. The Council welcomes the growing attractiveness of the Barents region for international tourism and recognizes the importance of Barents cooperation for the development of ecologically, socially and culturally sustainable tourism. The Council encourages the development of tourism-related goods and services drawing on and respecting the rich cultural competence of the inhabitants of the Barents region, including indigenous peoples, and acknowledges the potential of ecotourism that sustains the wellbeing of local communities and increases environmental awareness.

Environment and climate change

14. The Council acknowledges the importance of protecting the unique and fragile nature of the Barents Region from degradation due to loss of biodiversity, climate change, and pollution of the environment.

15. The Council emphasizes the need for holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees above preindustrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees, as agreed in the Paris Agreement. The Council encourages the BEAC working groups to contribute to the goals of the Paris Agreement by implementing relevant mitigation and adaptation measures, seizing the opportunities for a shift to a low carbon, resource efficient and sustainable future for the Barents Region. In this context, the Council pays attention to the need for enhanced measures to reduce black carbon emissions.

16. The Council welcomes the work done in implementing the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation from 2013, and endorses the revised Action Plan, encouraging the working groups to follow up and implement the

projects in the plan and provide progress reports to the Committee of Senior Officials. The Council encourages the Barents regions to further develop regional climate strategies.

17. The Council underlines the value of large areas of clean environment and untouched wilderness in the region and the importance of further measures to protect intact forests, wetlands and coastal areas in order to preserve the region's rich biodiversity in light of economic activity and climate change. The Council welcomes the implementation of the second phase of the Barents Protected Areas Network Project.

18. Bilateral transboundary water agreements promote cooperation on the management of shared water resources and account for the special characteristics of each border water area in the Barents region. The Council encourages relevant working groups to complement the valuable long-term work of the bilateral Transboundary Water Commissions by developing new concrete projects on water resources.

19. The Council recognizes that air and water quality and waste management is a prerequisite for long-term prosperity and human health in the region. The Council welcomes the progress in reducing the number of Barents environmental hot spots, and calls for enhanced environmental improvements with the aim of eliminating the remaining hot spots.

20. The Council emphasizes the need for the BEAC Member States to contribute to the implementation of the UN sustainable development goals. The Council calls for improved resource efficiency and underlines the importance of a circular and green economy, which contributes to mitigating climate change and reducing environmental degradation at the same time as it creates business opportunities and new jobs.

21. The Council welcomes the Joint Declaration of the BEAC Ministers of Environment Meeting in November 2015 in Sortavala, Russia and commends the environmental efforts of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership and the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation in the Barents region.

22. The Council commends the cooperation among emergency and rescue services in the Barents region and notes that the Barents Rescue 2017 was successfully held in the Republic of Karelia, Russia, in September 2017. The on-going work to improve border crossing with vehicles and equipment should continue. The

Council stresses that prevention of and response to natural and man-made disasters, including oil spills and radioactive pollution, should be further developed and possible synergies with other regional forums, especially the Arctic Council, should be considered in planning the improvements needed for enhancing operational efficiency.

Human and social development

23. The Council acknowledges the important work done for the empowerment and social inclusion of young people in the region and welcomes the initiatives to strengthen the knowledge-base of young people's living conditions in the Barents region. The Council calls for continued efforts on the part of all member states to support cross-border mobility and people-to-people contacts in the region.

24. The Council pays special attention to the protection and social inclusion of vulnerable groups in the region and welcomes the valuable contribution of the Children and Youth at Risk Programme in this regard.

25. The Council recognizes that health and social development are vital for the individual and for society in the Barents region. The Council welcomes the implementation of the 5th Barents Cooperation Programme on health and related social issues, which focuses on prevention and control of communicable diseases and mitigation of the serious threat of antimicrobial resistance, prevention of non-communicable diseases and the development of health systems and social services. Exchange of information and experience is important for aspects such as mobile and remote health services delivery. The Council also welcomes the good regional cooperation on health emergency, and underlines the importance of the work going on to remove barriers for cross-border transport of ambulances.

26. The Council acknowledges the value of a strong and dynamic cultural life for sustainable development in the Barents region and the potential of cultural cooperation in promoting a Barents identity characterized by openness and diversity. The Council furthermore acknowledges the importance of concrete projects and contacts between civil society and culture institutions and welcomes the Joint Declaration of the BEAC Ministers of Culture Meeting in November 2016 in Moscow, Russia. The Council commends the establishment of the Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation.

27. The Council underlines the need for further strengthening of academic cooperation and mobility in the Barents Region in response to needs in the field of human resources, research and innovation.

28. The Council reaffirms the commitment of the BEAC member states to protect and promote the rights of indigenous peoples and to fulfil their obligations in this regard, including by ensuring indigenous peoples' effective participation, through their own representative institutions, in decision-making at all levels on issues affecting them. The Council further reaffirms the right of indigenous peoples to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. The Council confirms that indigenous peoples' knowledge, traditional practices and strategies to sustain their environment shall be respected and taken into account in the Barents Euro-Arctic region and notes that the first Barents Indigenous Peoples' Summit was successfully held in Moscow, Russia, in April 2017.

29. The Council recognizes the right of the representatives of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples to participate at all levels of Barents cooperation and reaffirms the commitment of the four Barents region countries to provide financial support to this end.

Financing

30. The Council calls on the International Barents Secretariat in cooperation with other relevant bodies to further enhance the use of existing financing instruments for the benefit of the Barents region.

31. The Council underlines the importance of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes Karelia and Kolarctic, co-funded by the European Union, Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden in the implementation of Barents projects and notes with satisfaction the launch of the new programme period, in which the geographical scope and the objectives of Barents cooperation have to a large extent been taken into account.

32. The Council takes note of the initiative of the Russian BEAC chairmanship to establish a regional high-level forum ("the Barents Davos") to discuss the entire Barents agenda with an emphasis on sustainable social, economic and environmental development of the region, and tasks the CSO to further study this proposal.

33. The Council expresses its appreciation to the outgoing BEAC chair, Russia, and to the outgoing BRC chair, the region of Kainuu, Finland, as well as to the

International Barents Secretariat, the working groups and all other parties for their excellent work and welcomes the incoming BEAC chair, Sweden, and the incoming BRC chair, the region of Finnmark, Norway.

34. The Council welcomes the Swedish chairmanship's priorities and the invitation to the XVII Session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 2019 in Sweden.