



JOINT STATEMENT BY THE BARENTS REGIONAL COUNCIL AT THE BEAC 12TH SESSION

15 October 2009, Murmansk

Members of the Barents Regional Council (BRC) met in Murmansk 14 October 2009 for the 4th meeting under the chairmanship of Oulu region. The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), chaired by Russia, and the Barents Regional Council, chaired by Oulu region, shared common goals and led the Barents cooperation in the same direction during the period of the Oulu Chairmanship.

The Barents Regional Council recognizes the input that the Russian Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council has made to the Barents cooperation. Thanks to the efforts of the Russian Chairmanship, the cooperation between the national and the regional levels of the Barents Region has increased and reached a new level in creating permanent dialogue structures between the two levels.

The Barents Regional Council welcomes the work of the International Barents Secretariat (IBS) in Kirkenes acting as a tool for the national and the regional levels strengthening the multilateral efforts of the Barents cooperation by taking pro-active measures to facilitate the cooperation as well as by promoting more effective coordination and implementation of the decisions of the BEAC and the BRC.

The Barents Regional Council continues to focus on the implementation of the Barents Programme 2009-2013, adopted in November 2008 with the following prioritised areas: economic and commercial cooperation, sustainable living environment, human resources, indigenous peoples, transport and infrastructure, and information and communication.

Economic and commercial cooperation

The Barents Regional Council would like to initiate regular meetings between Ministers of the Barents Member Countries within different sectors. This would help advance the priorities in economy, infrastructure, environment, culture and other sectors of cooperation in the Barents Region. The first proposal is to arrange a

meeting of the Ministers of Economy in order to hasten the process of mutually bringing down existing barriers on the Barents borders to business establishments.

The Barents Regional Council fully supports the implementation and further development of the Visa Facilitation Agreement between the EU and the Russian Federation. It is also important to make visa processes more efficient especially for representatives of companies, business associations and tourist groups. That also counts for the Group Visa procedures because of the importance of the tourism industry and the people-to-people cooperation.

The Barents Regional Council wants to express its wish to further develop the economic cooperation in the Barents Region both on the national and the regional levels through the working group activities and the implementation of business projects.

The Barents Regional Council welcomes the establishment of the Joint Working Group on Tourism with its task to develop the tourism industry in the Region and to increase revenues and diversification in local employment.

Sustainable living environment

The Barents Regional Council emphasizes the importance of environmental protection and stresses, that special attention should be paid to climate change issues and the exclusion of the environmental Hot Spots in the Barents Region. The BRC will work to support the implementation of legislation reducing emissions of industrial pollution.

The development of oil, gas and heavy industry in order to enhance the economic development must be based on a safe, responsible and proactive environmental policy and long-term environmental strategy.

The Barents Regional Council commends the efforts of the Regional Working Group on Environment to implement its Action Programme for 2007-2010 focused on surface and drinking water issues, biodiversity, sustainable natural resource management and information and knowledge dissemination in close cooperation with the BEAC Working Group on Environment.

Human resources

The Barents Regional Council underlines the need of developing a common labour market, increasing the number of exchange students and creating attractive cities and regions both for men, women and youth in the Region. The BRC supports the implementation of the Cooperation Programme on Health and Related Social Issues in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region 2007-2010, the Barents Regional Youth Programme 2007-2010 and the Barents Cultural Programme 2008-2010.

The Barents Regional Council thanks the Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues for active cooperation in the fields of Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS

prevention and Children and Youth at Risk by implementing the sub-programmes respectively.

The Barents Regional Council thanks the Joint Working Group on Culture for taking active part in the International Forum "Culture of the Barents Forum" and promoting cultural interaction between the BEAC countries.

Indigenous peoples

The Barents Regional Council underlines the importance of the Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region 2009-2012, aiming at the development of the indigenous peoples' communities and societies in the Region. The Action Plan promotes measures within the fields of the development of trade and business, language and media, social and health related issues, environment, culture and political cooperation.

The Barents Regional Council thanks the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples for promoting indigenous entrepreneurship by preparing development projects.

Transport and infrastructure

In general the development of railway connections in the Region offers significant benefits for our economic cooperation. Also maritime activities are a vital part of the Region's economy, in the Barents Sea, the Norwegian Sea and in the Gulf of Bothnia.

The Barents Regional Council gives special support to the east-west transport developments and the flight connections in the Barents Region. With address to our national levels the Barents Regional Council underlines that it is important to maintain and improve the roads leading to the border crossing points.

These logistical development projects would contribute significantly to the overall cooperation activities in the Region, including both the people-to-people and economic cooperation. It is important to use and further develop data communications, for example, optic fibre broadband connections in the Region.

Information and communication

The Barents Regional Council gives priority to actively inform about the Barents cooperation, both internally and externally. Special attention must be given in increasing the visibility of the Barents issues internationally. This will include more attention and dialogue with different European institutions.

In addition to the above mentioned the BRC wants to stress the following:

The Barents Regional Council actively followed up and contributed to the EU Baltic Sea Strategy preparation process. It is important that the Barents Region and its needs and potentials will be taken into consideration in all the processes having an impact on the northernmost areas. The BRC also wishes that the Barents Region will be recognized as a significant and integral part of the Northern Dimension.

The Barents Regional Council has been actively following up the preparation of the ENPI programmes. The ENPI financing is very important for the implementation of the cross-border projects in the Barents Region. The BRC wants to express its concern about the delay of the launch of the ENPI programmes.

The Barents Regional Council calls for a region-wide transnational Barents project facilitating the implementation of the Barents Programme 2009-2013 adopted in November 2008, and therefore highlights the need of finding financing for the project. The Barents Region offers significant added value for the European cooperation. Therefore it is of vital importance to secure financing from the Baltic Sea Programme for major northern projects, bringing geographical balance to the transnational programmes.

The Barents Regional Council notes the successful work on the revitalisation of the Joint Working Group on Research and Education, which provides possibilities for better synergy in research and educational cooperation both on the national and the regional levels.

The Barents Regional Council welcomes the development of the Parliamentary cooperation in the Barents Region and supports the provisions of the Resolution of the 4th Barents Parliamentary Conference held in Syktyvkar 26-27 May 2009.

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

The Barents Regional Council thanks the Russian Chairmanship for productive cooperation and wishes the Swedish Chairmanship of the BEAC all the best in the future work and is looking forward to efficient cooperation.