



Barents Euro-Arctic Council

10th Session

Harstad, Norway

9 -10 November 2005

Joint Communiqué

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) convened its Tenth Session in Harstad on 9 – 10 November 2005, under the chairmanship of Norway.

Ministers and high representatives of the members (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the European Commission) participated in the Session, which was also attended by governors and other representatives of the Barents Regional Council, representatives of the indigenous peoples, parliaments, regional bodies, observer states, international financial institutions, United Nations organs, and other invited guests.

Introduction

1. The Council affirms the continuing validity of the principles and aims of the 1993 Kirkenes and 1998 Luleå Declarations, and the 2003 Prime Ministers' Declaration (Kirkenes). The overall objective of the cooperation in the Barents Region is to ensure sustainable development in all aspects: economic, environmental and social, and to strengthen comprehensive security in the Region. Thirteen years of cooperation have produced many effective programmes, projects and networks. Further efforts will now be made to take advantage of these achievements, adjust to meet new requirements, and ensure the continued development of the Region in an economically and socially dynamic and competitive way.
2. The Council expresses its support for deepened cooperation on various levels: intergovernmental, regional, among the indigenous peoples, and direct business, municipal and people-to-people cooperation. The Council underlines that work at local and regional levels is fundamental to the success of the Barents cooperation, emphasises the key role played by the Barents Regional Council and takes note of its Statement. The Council commends the initiatives taken for the purpose of defining long-term development strategies for the Region, among those the *Barents 2010* project, and confirms its readiness to work closely with the Regional Council in order to address issues holding back effective cooperation and to implement agreed measures aimed at increasing the overall welfare of the inhabitants in the Region.

Economic development

3. The Council calls for a more integrated approach to economic growth aimed at sustainable management of the Region's rich natural resources, increased value added production, research, innovation and infrastructure development in the Region. The economic cooperation has increased its effectiveness through a more direct involvement of business actors. The *Barents Industrial Partnership meetings*, with focus on the forest, mineral, oil/gas and other relevant sectors, should be further developed as a platform for enhanced interaction between authorities, economic operators and other stakeholders.
4. The Council emphasises the importance of small and medium enterprises in the economy. Russia's accession to the World Trade Organisation holds particular importance for this sector as it will broaden the prospects for trade and economic cooperation through harmonisation of economic framework conditions. In order to further stimulate investments and interaction between small and medium enterprises the Council urges a more effective use of available financing schemes, national as well as international.
5. The Barents Region is an energy producing and exporting region of global significance, but is also a large energy consumer. The Council emphasises the need to continuously improve energy efficiency in industry and the municipal sector, and to develop bioenergy and other renewable energy sources. The Council also calls for further measures to encourage cross border regional industrial cooperation in the field of environmental know-how and the supply and service industry in connection with large new oil and gas field developments.
6. The Council underlines the particular economic, social and environmental importance of the forests in the Barents Region. Existing work needs to be institutionally strengthened and aimed at promoting increased productivity of the forest sector and transparency in trade and forest certification schemes, at combatting illegal logging, and ensuring that biodiversity and environmental concerns are fully addressed. The Council calls for further efforts to enhance the competitiveness of the forest sector, including by encouraging private sector investments, and further measures to encourage cross-border cooperation in forest research, education and trainee programmes.
7. The Council notes the strong development impulses of modern transport infrastructure and services and urges the development of a priority transport axis in the Region (the Northern East-West Transport Corridor, which also includes the Barents Link concept and the promotion of sustainable Euro-Asian transport links). With BEATA (Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area) as one relevant component, the Council calls for further efforts to reinforce the role of Northern Europe in the overall transport system in Europe, including the possible establishment of a Northern Dimension partnership on transport and logistics. The Council calls for particular emphasis on the development, on a commercial basis, of new air connections, maritime transport (motorways of the sea), and the interface between sea and rail transport in the Region.

8. The Council notes that improved border management continues to be a key issue for east-west transport and economic cooperation in the Region. The Council recommends a further strengthening of cooperation on border control and customs issues and effective integration of these issues into the possible new Northern Dimension Partnership on transport and logistics.
9. The Council calls for renewed attention to tourism development in the Region and for promoting sustainable tourism through certification schemes for eco-tourism and the implementation of established guidelines.
10. The Council emphasises the importance of the development of information and communication technology infrastructure, services and use in the Region, noting the value of integration with the objectives and activities of the Northern eDimension Action Plan.

A safe and sound environment

11. The Barents Region contains some of Europe's largest and most pristine nature areas. At the same time the Region continues to face many serious environmental problems. The Council welcomed the Declaration adopted by the BEAC Ministers of Environment on 19 October 2005 and emphasises the importance of having up-to-date and common environmental management principles. The Council encourages further development of environmental impact assessments as a policy tool and strengthened cooperation to meet the high standards necessary in order to ensure effective protection of the inland, coastal and marine environment, especially with regard to increased exploration, production and transport of oil and gas, as well as hazardous activities in general.
12. The Council notes the recommendations and findings of Arctic Council's Arctic Climate Impact Assessment and emphasises the potentially serious consequences of climate change to the Region. The Council endorsed the recommendations contained in a special CSO report, including a list of measures for the period 2006-2010, and invited the Barents Regional Council to participate in their implementation. The Council underlines the need for close coordination with efforts undertaken within the framework of the Arctic Council, and welcomes Russia's readiness to consider joining the Testing Ground Agreement when the internal legislation for the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol is adopted. In this regard, the possibility of a Barents programme for activities implemented jointly should be explored.
13. The Council welcomed the establishment in 2004 of the Barents Hot Spots Facility managed by the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO). This is a special project development fund for the environmental "hot spots" in the Russian part of the Region. The Council encourages partnership financing, including domestic Russian financing (public and private) for the early implementation of priority projects. The Council recalled the aim to launch environmental measures and achieve substantial progress in all of the "hot spots" by 2013. The Council welcomes the cooperation on "hot spots", which has been started between the BEAC and the Arctic Council.

14. The Council welcomes the further efforts in the Region to promote cleaner production, both as an economic, social and environmental performance enhancer, and urges the use of a lifecycle perspective and, whenever possible, of the best available technology. The Council urges increased attention to cooperation between different actors, use of a mix of instruments, practical and low-cost measures to reduce the overall environmental load and protect the population from pollution induced ailments.

15. The Council underlines the importance of maintaining the biodiversity of the Barents Region and draws attention to the crucial role of sustainable management of terrestrial and marine natural resources. The Council therefore also notes the Strategies tabled by the Arctic Council's programme Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna and endorsed their recommendations to be implemented in the Barents Region. The Council calls for continued attention to the preservation of the ecological balance including nature conservation, protection of fresh water, coastal waters and oceans from pollution. The Council recognises the resolution on biodiversity from the fifth environment for Europe ministerial conference in 2003, and reaffirms the commitment from Kiev to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010.

16. The Council notes the special CSO report on implementation of nuclear safety projects and agrees that major steps have now been taken in order to improve nuclear and radiological safety in the Region. A number of important projects are being implemented and beginning to yield results. The Council emphasises the importance of the MNEPR Agreement in this regard. The Council commends the successful work of the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) and expresses support for the continuation of its nuclear waste projects together with further enhancing of the environmental window of the NDEP fund.

Human and social development

17. The Council emphasises the importance of the cooperation on health and related social issues and welcomes the elaboration and putting into effect of a sub-programme to address HIV/AIDS in the Region. This programme contributes to the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being. The Council called for a similar sub-programme for young people and children at risk and for a continued focus on lifestyle related diseases, and recalls the objective of gaining control of the spread of tuberculosis by 2013.

18. The Council calls for further strengthening of cooperation between higher education institutions and research institutions, and welcomes steps already taken in order to make the Region more attractive for students and researchers from members and other countries. Additional efforts should be made in order to promote mobility, joint study programmes, joint research programmes and mutual recognition of study programmes and degrees, which are in line with the main objectives of the Bologna Process.

19. The Council commends the efforts made on regional level in order to strengthen cultural cooperation, build a new sense of identity and capitalise on the rich history of

the Region. The Council urges continued implementation of the existing action plan developed by the Regional Working Group on Culture.

20. The Council commends the cooperation on youth issues between all levels of the Barents cooperation and in particular emphasises the importance of work conducted through the Barents Youth Cooperation Office (BYCO) in Murmansk, jointly financed by Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. The youth dimension of the Barents cooperation should be further developed as one of the instruments to ensure the Region's economic and social viability. One important element would be to further facilitate youth mobility and youth employment opportunities in a regional context.

21. The Council calls for efforts in cooperation with the Barents Regional Council to safeguard gender equality and strengthen women's, including indigenous women's, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and representation in political fora.

22. The Council notes that the Regional Council has declared 2005 Indigenous Peoples Year in the Barents Cooperation and commends the broad programme of events and other measures involving all member counties of the Region. The Council notes ongoing work on a renewed and comprehensive action plan for indigenous peoples and urges all interested parties to ensure its effective financing and implementation. The Council requests the CSO to further develop the mechanisms of cooperation with the indigenous peoples and to provide guidance and assistance in the implementation of the plan of action. The Council notes that the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples has consultative status both with regard to the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council and requests the CSO to look into possible ways to enhance this combined role.

23. The Council commends the expanded cooperation among emergency and rescue services in the Barents Region and notes that the large-scale civil-military exercise *Barents Rescue 2005* was successfully held in Finnmark in September 2005. The Council welcomes the plan by Finland to host the third Barents Rescue exercise in 2007. The Council notes the significant progress in the negotiations on an agreement on cooperation in the field of emergency prevention, preparedness and response in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, and urges its early signing and entry into force.

24. The Council urges increased cooperation among relevant authorities in the Region in order to combat crime, maintain a high level of preparedness against terrorist activities, organised crime and public order challenges, including trafficking in human beings. The Council notes the successful Conference on trafficking in human beings in Murmansk in September 2005 and welcomes the intention to continue operative work at local and regional level.

25. The Council reiterates the objective to facilitate legitimate trade and travel in the Region and underlines the importance of a common and favourable approach in this matter. The Council welcomes the conclusion of the negotiations on the EU-Russia agreements on visa facilitation and readmission and looks forward to their simultaneous entry into force as soon as possible. Icelandic and Norwegian citizens will benefit from equivalent procedures after these countries have concluded similar bilateral agreements with Russia.

Mechanisms of cooperation

26. The Council thanks the chairs and participants of the working groups and task forces and emphasises its interest in a further strengthening of BEAC-BRC working level coordination/cooperation, including the establishment of joint groups with joint national-regional chairmanships. The Chair brought to the attention of the Council an independent report, commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, containing a review of the content and structure of cooperation. The Council received a Norwegian offer to host an international secretariat for the Barents cooperation in Kirkenes, and instructed the CSO to address this issue in cooperation with the Regional Council.

27. The Council requests increased emphasis to be put on multilateral financing of programmes and activities, joint project preparation and monitoring. The 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, and urges their region wide applicability, as appropriate.

28. The Council welcomes the improved coordination and cooperation between the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and other intergovernmental regional bodies, such as the Council of Baltic Sea States, the Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers with the aim to maximise the effectiveness of efforts in different areas. The Council in particular emphasises the prospects of enhanced cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers and urges the early launching of joint activities.

29. The Council notes the importance of and its interest in an effective Northern Dimension policy also with regard to this Region's development, recalled the importance of the two Northern Dimension partnerships which have been established and welcomed the possibility to present proposals and influence on the development of the Northern Dimension after 2006. The Council supports the alignment of the Northern Dimension guidelines shortly to be adopted by the fourth Northern Dimension ministerial meeting with the Road maps of the four EU-Russia Common Spaces.

30. The Council expressed its satisfaction at the holding of the Second Barents Parliamentary Conference in Bodø in June 2005 and underlines the importance of contact, cooperation and support by the national parliaments and the regional assemblies in matters regarding the Barents Region.

31. The Council emphasises the role of the general public and non-governmental sector in the Barents Region and urges a further expansion of crossborder exchanges, grass-root activities and people-to-people cooperation. These are essential tools to foster regional identity, strengthen transparency and democratic decision-making and efficiency of governance. The Council calls for enhancement of twin-city and municipal cooperation and urges expansion of exchanges and cooperation among representatives of the mass media in the Region.

32. The Council calls for continued attention to regional, local and multi-stakeholder action for sustainable development, including coordinated efforts and exchange of experience in order to meet Local Agenda 21 objectives.

33. The Council expresses its appreciation to the outgoing Chair, Norway, for its excellent work and welcomes the incoming Chair, Finland. The Council notes the Finnish chairmanship priorities for 2005-2007 and accepts the kind invitation of the Government of Finland to host the next Session of the Council in 2007, at a time and venue to be determined.