

12th SESSION OF THE BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC COUNCIL

JOINT COMMUNIQUE

Murmansk, 15 October 2009

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) convened its 12th Session in Murmansk on 14–15 October 2009 under the chairmanship of the Russian Federation.

Ministers and senior representatives of the Members (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the European Commission) participated in the Session, which was also attended by governors, political leaders and other representatives of the Barents Regional Council (BRC), representatives of the indigenous peoples of the Barents Region, national parliaments and regional legislative entities, regional councils in the North, international financial organisations, observer states and other invited guests.

Introduction

1. The Council affirms the continuing validity of the principles and objectives of the Kirkenes Declaration of January 1993, which laid the foundation of the current multilateral cooperation in the region of the Barents Sea as well as of all other documents expressing the common will of the BEAC Members to strengthen stability, confidence and sustainable development in the North of Europe. BEAC activities, including broad cooperation within the economic, environmental and social fields, continue to be an important instrument in achieving these goals.

2. The Council reaffirms its strong commitment to continue promoting the Barents cooperation in the fields of economy, environmental protection, energy, transport, education, culture, public health and related social issues, youth exchanges, prevention of emergencies and rescue services, tourism, customs procedures and further improvement of the conditions for the indigenous peoples. The Council pledges to work further to improve the well-being and living standards of all the peoples of the region based on common democratic values. Participation by international organisations and multilateral

financial instruments in achieving these goals is welcome.

3. The Council notes with satisfaction that the focus of the Russian chairmanship of the BEAC has been on solving comprehensively the social, economic and environmental problems existing in the region, strengthening the integration processes between the partners, and ensuring the specific interests of the Barents indigenous peoples.

4. The Council takes note of the statement made by the Barents Regional Council at the Session and expresses its satisfaction with the close interaction in many fields between the national and regional levels as a fundamental precondition for the overall success of the Barents cooperation. In this respect the Council notes with satisfaction the adoption of the Barents Programme 2009–2013 which is the framework for the inter-regional cooperation and identifies the priority areas of activity for the period. The Council urges that special attention be paid to ensuring participation in the implementation of this Programme by all the 13 Barents regions.

5. The Council notes that the Northern Dimension, a common policy shared by the EU, Iceland, Norway and Russia, and its agreed and planned Partnerships demonstrate that constructive cooperation is ongoing on a range of projects which also benefit citizens of the Barents Region. BEAC, as a participant, plays an active role in the development of the Northern Dimension.

6. The Council recognises the interlinked challenges of economy, climate change and the need for sustainable and efficient use of natural resources as one of the most important issues to be tackled to ensure global sustainability.

Human and Social Development

7. The Council notes with satisfaction that implementation of the Cooperation Programme on Health and Related Social Issues for 2008–2011 is well under way. The Council states that the monitoring of the HIV/AIDS Programme has shown progress and urges the relevant authorities to continue their cooperation on both HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. The Council considers it urgent to facilitate the implementation of the 2003 Kirkenes Declaration of Prime Ministers, urging “health and social authorities to gain full control of the spread of tuberculosis in the Barents Region within 10 years”, i.e. by 2013. It is of crucial importance to implement measures that follow up the assessment of the tuberculosis situation in the Barents Region and promote

cooperation aimed at eliminating tuberculosis. The Council underlines the importance of supporting the implementation of the Programme on Children and Youth at Risk. Coordination with the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being should be continued.

8. The Council calls for further strengthened cooperation in academic and research spheres and supports integration of the educational systems of the Members and internationalisation of their education and research environment, promotion of academic mobility programmes and implementation of joint educational projects in line with the objectives of the Bologna Process and for the purpose of preparing highly qualified specialists capable of working in globalised conditions. Additional efforts should be undertaken to make the region more attractive for students and researchers from the Members and other countries. The Council strongly supports the reactivation of the Barents Joint Working Group on Education and Research.

9. The Council commends the efforts of the Joint Working Group on Culture to increase the impact of culture in the Barents Region through the implementation of the second Cultural Cooperation Programme “New Winds in the Barents Region” for 2008–2010 with the aim of promoting cultural diversity and multicultural dialogue and of using culture as a tool for regional, social and economic development. The Council underlines the importance of the development of Barents cultural cooperation in interaction with other international platforms including the Northern Dimension policy and its envisaged Partnership on Culture and the Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Council of Europe.

10. The Council continues to pay special attention to the problems and opportunities of the Barents indigenous peoples and their involvement in cooperation in the field of education, public health, culture, traditional activities and economic activity in general, environmental protection and infrastructure improvement.

11. The Council underlines the need to address the challenges facing the indigenous peoples of the region and stresses the importance of cooperation and dialogue with and between indigenous peoples. Extensive industrial activity and climate change are identified as being among the main challenges. The Members acknowledge their responsibility for preserving and developing the livelihoods of the population of the region, including the population inhabiting remote areas. The Council emphasises the role of the Working Group of

Indigenous Peoples in multilateral cooperation and supports the implementation of the Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples 2009–2012, which focuses on measures in the fields of business development, languages and media, health and related social issues, environment and use of nature, culture and political cooperation. The Council also welcomes the decision on the participation of representatives of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples in all sessions of the BEAC Committee of Senior Officials and other BEAC working groups.

12. The Council underlines the importance of ensuring gender equality in the Barents Region and improving the situation of women, including indigenous women, with regard to employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, education and public representation.

13. The Council emphasises the importance of further developing the youth cooperation between the BEAC Members at national and regional level, and in this respect strongly supports the activity of the Working Group on Youth Policy and the Barents Youth Cooperation Office in Murmansk, which is currently financed by Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. The Council welcomes the results of the Barents Euro-Arctic Conference of Ministers responsible for youth policy, which was devoted to the most pressing issues facing young people today, including the region's economic and social viability, environment, mobility, employment, intercultural understanding and youth participation.

14. The Council commends the enhanced cooperation between emergency and rescue services in the Barents Region. The Council welcomes the signature of the "Agreement between the Governments in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region on Cooperation within the Field of Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response" as a significant milestone in the development of practical cooperation between the authorities concerned with the view to improving the security and safety of the people living in the region. The Council highlights the importance of the Barents Rescue 2009 Exercise organised by Russia.

15. The Council notes the active role of the Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation in its work aimed at improving preconditions for mutual assistance in case of emergency in any of the participating states. The Council encourages the Joint Committee to continue facilitation of the provisions for mutual emergency and rescue services in the region.

16. The Council welcomes the establishment of the Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT) in the Barents Region with a mandate to

promote support for private and public institutions active in the field of tourism. The tasks of the JWGT are to develop the tourism industry in the region, increase revenues and diversification in local employment and facilitate cultural, social and business contacts.

Economic Development

17. The Council supports efforts to further improve economic cooperation at all levels in the region as a tool to ensure its sustainable development on the basis of existing human and natural resources. Increased interaction between authorities, businesses and other actors is contributing to overcoming the consequences of the global financial crisis and to provide conditions improving the prosperity of the peoples of the region. The Council welcomes the positive and proactive role played by the BEAC Working Group on Economic Cooperation in this regard.

18. The Council considers the application of innovative research and technologies in production vital for increasing the competitiveness of the Barents Region in the global economy, as well as for the creation of networks for relevant data sharing. The Council calls for the establishment of a triangle “science”–“education”–“business”, with a view to involve young people, the most active part of population, in enhancing business activity.

19. The Council reaffirms its willingness to continue its efforts to create a favourable investment climate for entrepreneurs, especially in the small and medium size enterprise sector. This area has benefited from the well-established Barents Industrial Partnership meetings, which provide opportunities to exchange views on a wide range of pressing issues concerning regional cross-border interaction.

20. The Council welcomes the active role of the regional business community and particularly the Barents Business Advisory Group in improving business opportunities.

21. The Council emphasises the growing role of forests and forest industries in the economy of Northern Europe and underlines the need for sustainable forest management and welcomes the prolongation of the activity of the Barents Forest Sector Task Force under the Russian chairmanship. Its work has highlighted new, promising directions for multilateral exchange of experience and knowledge in the areas of bio-energy, climate stabilisation, networks of model forests and others in accordance with national legislation.

22. The Council welcomes the ongoing cooperation on energy efficiency issues at all levels, including the resumption of the work of the Joint Working Group on Energy and the contribution of the Nordic Environmental Financing Corporation (NEFCO) to assessments and implementation of energy efficiency measures and technologies. The Council calls for enhanced cooperation between different working groups of the Council and underlines the need to expand cross-border cooperation between different actors in the Barents Region, aimed at capacity building and sustainable use of renewable energy and innovative energy-efficient technologies in the industrial and housing sectors.

23. The Council underlines the need for the Barents Region to develop an efficient transport and logistics infrastructure adapted to modern requirements in order to facilitate trade-flows in and out of the region and integrate it more closely into global economic networks.

24. The Council appreciates the activities of the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area (BEATA), as well as the projects conducted according to the BEATA programme objectives, and urges the Parties to continue these efforts.

25. In the view of the Council, the Parties should, using the BEATA framework, identify and consider new projects for the development of an integrated multimodal transport system in the region, eliminating bottlenecks and facilitating all means of transportation. The new possibilities arising from the establishment of the new Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics should also be explored.

26. The Council emphasises the need for continued efforts on the part of the customs administrations in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region to further develop and simplify customs procedures and remove excessive customs barriers. Improved cooperation between neighbouring customs authorities at the borders (exchange of information, regular meetings, coordination of working methods) is a key element in reducing waiting time at border crossings and improving conditions for trade.

Environment

27. The Council reaffirms the validity of the decisions of the 8th Meeting of the Barents Ministers of Environment in Moscow in 2007 and acknowledges the work of the BEAC Working Group on Environment (WGE), especially the enhanced project activity under the newly

established sub-groups on cleaner production and environmentally sound consumption, nature protection and water issues. The Council also notes with appreciation the close cooperation with the Regional Working Group on Environment and acknowledges the potential of small- and medium-sized projects to achieve environmental improvements.

28. The Council stresses the urgent need to take environmental vulnerability and concerns into account in economic activities in the Barents Region, notes the importance of integrating environmental issues in other sectors, and actively supports the development of environmental solutions suitable for northern and Arctic conditions.

29. The Council recognizes climate change as a major concern. Estimated impacts of climate change, including its threat to traditional living cycles of indigenous peoples, ecosystem services, biodiversity, human health, as well as economic costs, show that urgent action is necessary. Development of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures should be of high priority in the whole Barents cooperation. The Council therefore recognizes the urgent need for a substantial, comprehensive, ambitious and effective global climate agreement at the UNFCCC 15th Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen in December 2009 recalling the Declaration of the Leaders at the Major Economies' Forum on Energy and Climate at L'Aquila on 9 July 2009.

30. The Council welcomes the results of the Conference on Climate Change in the Barents Region held in September 2009 in Vadsø, and considers it as an important input to further cooperation in this field and recommends that the thematic issues addressed at the conference are followed up by the Council and the WGE together with other relevant bodies of the Council.

31. The Council takes note of the results of the joint BEAC and Nordic Council of Ministers project on the effects of climate change on biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Barents Region and welcomes the follow-up of the project and looks forward to its results.

32. The Council stresses the importance of cleaner production and energy saving as ways of promoting economic and environmental efficiency, and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. The Council also notes the important work carried out on sustainable consumption and production in the Barents Region.

33. The Council emphasises the urgency of solving the environmental problems that constitute the "hot spots" in the Barents

Region, and calls for political impetus in order to, by 2013, launch relevant projects aimed at exclusion of all “hot spots”. The Council therefore welcomes the work of an ad-hoc task force on “hot spots” and looks forward to its work on developing criteria for “hot spot” elimination. In the coming years, reinforced efforts on the part of central and regional authorities, contribution from NEFCO and cooperation with the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership and the Arctic Council will be important to meet this goal. The active participation of the Committee of Senior Officials and the International Barents Secretariat will be important, and the Council therefore supports that the International Barents Secretariat should take an active part in the management of the “hot spots” database in cooperation with the WGE and NEFCO.

Mechanisms of Cooperation

34. The Council recognises the growing role of the Arctic Council as the main vehicle for circumpolar cooperation and stresses the importance of cooperation and coordination with the Arctic Council on issues and projects of common concern at all relevant levels in order to maximise synergies.

35. The Council stresses the potential of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) as a significant source of joint financing, and calls for the participation of all the regional members of the Barents cooperation in the ENPI programmes. The Council looks forward to seeing the ENPI Cross-Border Cooperation programmes becoming operational once the financing agreements between the European Commission and Russia have been signed.

36. The Council believes that one prerequisite for successful cooperation in the Barents Region, and thus for maximizing its effectiveness and producing synergies, is closer coordination with other international and regional organisations and councils in the North, primarily with the Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

37. The Council notes the growing importance of the parliamentary dimension in the Barents Cooperation and in this context expresses its satisfaction with the holding and the outcome of the 4th Barents Parliamentary Conference in Syktyvkar in May 2009, which was devoted to all aspects of sustainable development of the Barents Region.

38. The Council welcomes the results of the International Polar Year 2007–2008 as a scientific foundation for practical measures aimed

at promoting sustainable development of the Barents Region with close linkage between economic, environmental and social factors.

39. The Council encourages enhanced cooperation within the non-governmental sector in the Barents Region, with a view to further expansion of cross-border exchanges, people-to-people contacts and interaction between representatives of mass media and twin cities.

40. The Council believes that the establishment of the International Barents Secretariat (IBS) has created favourable conditions for making the Barents cooperation more coherent and efficient, for better utilising available administrative and financial resources and for more effective coordination, promotion and implementation of the decisions of the BEAC and the BRC, and approves the initial results of the work of the IBS. Enhanced exchanges between the Secretariats of the Regional Councils in the North should be a part of the multilateral cooperation process, and should therefore be encouraged. The Council welcomes the attention paid by the Secretariat to indigenous peoples' issues and in this respect supports the secondment of an Indigenous Peoples' Adviser to the IBS, as well as the implementation of the cooperation project on Indigenous Entrepreneurship.

41. The Council expresses its appreciation to the outgoing Chair, the Russian Federation, the Chairs and Participants of the BEAC Committee of Senior Officials, BEAC and Joint Working Groups and the Task Force for their excellent work and welcomes the incoming Chair, the Kingdom of Sweden. The Council notes the Swedish chairmanship's priorities for 2009–2011 and accepts the kind invitation of the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden to host the next session of the Council in 2011, at a time and venue to be determined.

42. The Council also thanks the outgoing Chair of the Barents Regional Council, Oulu Region of Finland, and the Chairs and Participants of the Regional Committee, Working Groups and the Ad Hoc Group for their excellent work and welcomes the incoming Chair, Troms County of Norway.