



24<sup>th</sup> of January 2014

## **Report on the work of the Joint Working Group on Youth during the Norwegian Chairmanship (2011-2013) in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council**

### **About the Joint Working Group on Youth policy (JWGY)**

The Barents cooperation has working groups on both national and regional level on different policy areas. The Ministries of the member state that holds the Chairmanship in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) chair the Barents Euro-Arctic Working groups on the national level. The county that holds the Chairmanship in the Regional Council chairs the Barents Regional working groups on the regional level. The working groups at the national and regional levels are in continuous cooperation.

The two working groups, the Working Group on Youth Policy (WGYP) on the national level and the Regional Working Group on Youth Issues (RWGYI) on the regional level, were merged into the Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY) in 2011. The terms of reference for the JWGY was drafted during the Swedish chairmanship (2009-11) and the first meeting of the JWGY was held in Oslo 2. – 4. November 2011.

During the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 2011-2013, the Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion was the Chair of the JWGY.

### **The work of the JWGY during the Norwegian Chairmanship**

During the Norwegian Chairmanship, the JWGY held four meetings, one youth conference and worked with the following tasks:

- Drafted a new Work Plan for the JWGY. A consensus on Work Plan of the JWGY will be sought at the next WG meeting in March 2014
- Organized the Barents Youth Conference 2012 to incorporate the voice of young people in the future work of the working group, and in the future development of the Barents cooperation through input to the New Kirkenes-declaration
- Developed a more sustainable financing structure of the Barents Youth Cooperation Office (BYCO)
- Revision of the Terms of Reference of the Executive Officer of the BYCO. The Terms of Reference was adopted during the Chairmanship's last meeting in October 2013
- A new Executive Officer of BYCO was appointed for a four-year period from 01.01.2014



- Addressed the empowerment of youth structures in the Barents cooperation
- Addressed challenges with securing the continuation of Barents Regional Youth Council-representatives (BRYC)

### **The voice of the youth of the Barents Region**

The Youth of the Barents Region are passionate about the future of their Region. They want their voice to be heard and to have the possibility to influence their future.

Therefore, the Norwegian Chairmanship of the JWGY, invited youth from all over the Barents Region to the Barents Youth Conference 2012, held in October 2012. The youth were asked about their visions for the future of the Region and what challenges that needs to be addressed.

During the conference the participants emphasized that mobility and cooperation across the boarders have to be promoted and supported. Also, cooperation in the field of education, innovation and entrepreneurship has to be encouraged and transition from education to the labour market has to be improved. Furthermore, the participants stressed the importance of the people-to-people cooperation through exchanges of child and youth groups, supporting common multilateral projects and activities, improved east-west communication in the Barents Region and simplified procedures for obtaining visas will contribute to the development of the Region.

The conclusions from the Youth Conference were submitted to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The JWGY held a back-to-back-meeting with the conference and concluded on drafting a text based from the conclusions from the Conference to the New Kirkenes-Declaration and to the JWGY Work Plan.

### **The JWGY recognizes that;**

- a. Children and Youth are the most valuable resource for the future development of the Barents Region. It is crucial for the cooperation, the development and the sustainability of the Region.
- b. An active Child and Youth Policy in the Barents Region is needed in order to secure a stable level of the population in the Region. An active Child and Youth Policy in the Barents Region will also contribute to the development of democracy on regional and local level through increased child and youth participation in decision making processes.
- c. Mobility and cooperation across the boarders have to be promoted and supported.
- d. Cooperation in the field of education, innovation and entrepreneurship has to be encouraged. Transition from education to the labour market has to be improved.



- e. People to people cooperation through exchanges of child and youth groups, supporting common multilateral projects and activities, improved east-west communication in the Barents Region and simplified procedures for obtaining visas will contribute to the development of the Region.

### **The New Kirkenes-Declaration on Youth**

During the Barents Summit in Kirkenes on the 3<sup>rd</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> of June 2013, the Prime Ministers and other high-level representatives of the Barents Euro Arctic Council states as follows on youth:

*"It is important to bring young people from various parts of the region together, with a view to fostering positive involvement and interaction in both national and international arenas. The Barents Regional Youth Council and the Barents Youth Cooperation Office have important roles in this context. People-to-people contacts continue to be a key to positive development in the region".*

*"Civil society cooperation has an important role to play in the promotion of sustainable development and people-to-people contacts. We encourage enhanced cross-border connections and cooperation between non-governmental organizations including youth organizations and mass media in the Barents region".*

### **The financing of BYCO in 2014**

The last meeting of the JWGY during the Norwegian Chairmanship was held on the 29<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> of October 2013 in Oslo. The Norwegian Chairman had prepared a draft agreement on financing the BYCO for 2014-2016. The proposed annual contribution of the amount of 15 000 euro per financing country was not accepted. The working group decided therefore to have a one-year agreement for 2014 with a contribution of 10 000 euro, with the possibility for voluntary contributions. The financing of BYCO for the period 2015-2017 will be examined in 2014.

### **The Finnish Chairmanship of the JWGY (2013-2015)**

Finland took over the Chairmanship of the JWGY from Norway on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 2013. The Finnish Chairmanship will build on the work of previous Chairs. The overall priority of the Finnish Chairmanship is the *social inclusion of young people, incl. the access to education and employment of all young people*. To concretize the objectives of the Finnish Chairmanship and to strengthen the commitment between those involved, the JWGY, in cooperation with the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, will organize two thematic youth policy seminars. Young people themselves will play a key role in these activities. Promoting equal opportunities and non-discrimination of all young people will be enhanced through the Chairmanship agenda. The Council of Europe "No hate speech movement" will be made visible through the Chairmanship activities.