

The 7th Parliamentary Barents Conference was held on 28- 30 September 2015 at the Finnish Parliament in Helsinki. On Monday 28 September, conference participants visited the Arctic Shipping Ltd's icebreaker "Urho" and were introduced to the fields of icebreaking as well as rescue missions in arctic conditions.

Economic cooperation including transport and logistics

The Conference program was launched on Tuesday 30 September by the Speaker of Parliament of Finland Ms. *Maria Lohela* and the former Finnish Foreign Minister Mr. *Erkki Tuomioja*. The main theme of the first session was economic cooperation including transport and logistics in the Barents region. The first part-session of this session examined the cross-border economic cooperation. The part-session was chaired by MP, Ms. *Johanna Ojala-Niemelä*, Chair of the Finnish Delegation to the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region.

Governor of Västerbotten County in Sweden, Ms. *Magdalena Andersson* drew attention to the growing demand for natural resources caused by population growth as well as the central role of natural gas in the economy of the Barents Region. Ms. Andersson also reflected on the impact of the EU sulfur directive and called for more environmentally friendly mining industry as a way of insuring sustainable development in the area. In addition, Ms. Andersson emphasized that a part of the Arctic region should be preserved intact for posterity and dialogue with indigenous peoples should be intensified.

The tourism industry continues to grow worldwide approximately 3% per annum and the Nordic countries rank among the top 20 tourist destinations and therefore enhancing the brand of the Barents region and developing the provision of services should be top priorities. Particularly in the field of specialized tourism the region would have a lot to offer. Moreover, the business sector of the Barents Region offers significant expertise in Arctic and cold climate technology. At the end of her speech, Ms. Andersson called for the Barents countries to speed up the process of establishing an oil spill response center of the Arctic region.

MP, Mr. *Ville Skinnari* from the Finnish Parliament, examined in his speech industry in the Barents Region and its potential in relation to future employment opportunities. Too many cross-border barriers still exist and they slow down the otherwise promising development. Mr. Skinnari also underscored the importance of cooperation in the tourism sector and regretted that only approximately 15-20% of the Asian tourists travelling to Europe through the Nordic countries visit the latter.

MP, Mr. *Ola Johansson*, from the Parliament of Sweden called for a Nordic resolution on sustainable mining industry based on national and international legislation. Previous recommendations of the Nordic Council and the EU initiative on raw materials could serve as a basis for such a resolution. There is an acute need for a wider agreement as the world demand for iron ore and other minerals increases. Recycling economy could be one solution for a more sustainable use of raw material resources, Mr. Johansson pointed out.

The second part-session of the first session focused on new possibilities of transport and logistics. Part-session was chaired by MP, Mr. *Krister Hammarbergh*, from the Parliament of Sweden.

The first speech was given by Ms. *Anne Berner*, Minister of Transport and Communications in Finland. Minister Berner spoke about digitalization and its effects on logistics in northern conditions. The Nordic region's asset lies in the know-how and the snow-how including knowledge on icebreaking and logistical innovations. While the northern regions are home to quite a small number of inhabitants, they invest highly in the movement of goods and people. Digitalization and automation are becoming more common, and sea routes, for example, are being developed. Operating in cold climate conditions, weather

forecasting and data transfer are areas in which the Nordic countries are at the forefront of development.

The second speaker was MP, Mr. *Eirik Sivertsen*, from the Parliament of Norway, and he informed the conference participants of the development of sustainable infrastructure solutions. Relatively long distances in the Barents Region challenge mobility. Mr. Sivertsen stressed that it is important to maintain and develop air, land and sea transport routes and also invests in electronic data transfer. The Barents Region does not lack will to enhance mobility and to find common logistical solutions.

Ms. *Reija Viinanen*, CEO of Region of Fell Lapland, presented an automatic transport project called Aurora. It is a four-year project which focuses on developing robotic cars for customer use in the northern regions. Cars are currently in the test phase and are tested in the demanding conditions of Muonio area in northern Finland. The idea is that customers can book a robotic car for personal use by using a mobile phone application. The project pays great attention to safe driving, reducing the number accidents, as well as the creation of electronic map database open to everyone.

The part-session was concluded by Mr. *Oddgeir Danielsen*, Director of Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics. He spoke about a recent report on Barents Region Transport plan and underlined how it is important to improve mobility not only in Central European routes but also in the northern regions. According to Mr. Danielsen, actors in the Barents region should take into account the overall picture when developing transportation and see the challenges in a larger context. It is important to consider how the Barents Region will perform in both local and global context. A clear common vision will help to maintain the Barents region strong.

Environmental issues including climate change

Environmental issues including climate change were the main theme of the second session. The first part-session of this session focused on current and future environmental cooperation. The part-session was chaired by MP, Ms. *Rigmor Andersen Eide*, from the Norwegian Parliament.

The aim of this part-session was to discuss current environmental cooperation in the Barents Region as well as future cooperation. The aim of the environmental cooperation in the Barents Region is to preserve the area's natural uniqueness and diversity and promote the region's sustainable development.

The first presentation was given by Ms. *Hannele Pokka*, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment in Finland. Ms. Pokka spoke about the future objectives and the challenges of environmental cooperation in the Barents Region as well as presented some of the ongoing environmental and nature conservation projects in the area. Ms. Pokka mentioned, for instance, the Green Zone of Fennoscandia, which consists of existing and planned nature conservation areas in the border region between Finland, Norway and Russia stretching from the Gulf of Finland to the Barents Sea including the environmental measures in the so called hot spots in the Russian Barents Region.

MP, Ms. *Sara Karlsson*, from the Swedish Parliament, addressed in particular the challenges brought about by climate change and common ways to combat them in the Barents Region. She looked at environmental issues in the region using the concept of so called planetary boundaries. This refers to the limits in the Earth's carrying capacity which, if exceeded, raise the threat of irreversible environmental changes. As a specific risk, Ms. Karlsson also mentioned oil spill disasters and the importance of cooperation in their prevention in the Barents Region.

Mr. *Jaakko Henttonen*, Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership Manager, presented the structure and activities of the Environment Partnership. Mr. Henttonen also addressed the need for and possibilities of environmental investments in the Barents Region. There is a particular need of investment in projects which improve the energy efficiency of heating plants, focus on the reduction of soot emissions and develop the network of wastewater and hazardous waste disposal sites.

The last speech of the session was given by Mr. *Jānis Vucāns*, President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary

Conference. Mr. *Vucāns* introduced the model of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region which would have much to offer to the Arctic cooperation schemes. In addition, he presented some of the achievements of the working group on green growth and energy efficiency. Mr. Vucāns underlined the importance of concrete joint actions and cooperation in the fight against natural disasters caused by climate change.

The second part-session of the second session involved looking at new forms of energy in the Barents Region. The part-session was chaired by MP, Mr. Eirik Sivertsen from the Norwegian Parliament.

The second part-session was opened by MP, Ms. *Cecilie Tenfjord-Toftby*, from the Swedish Parliament. Ms. Tenfjord-Toftby focused in her speech on green growth and potential for ecological growth from the perspective of the Baltic Sea cooperation. Green growth involves everyday energy efficiency, ecological choices and change in our attitudes. These three factors will also help to boost the engines of competitiveness. Ms. Tenfjord-Toftby pointed out that in order to guarantee ecological growth, it is also necessary to make investments and finance projects to help promote growth.

Mr. *Timo Ritonummi*, Deputy Director General from the Finnish Ministry of Employment and Economy, gave a briefing on Finland's energy policy. According to the Finnish energy program, the goal is to end the use of coal as energy source as well as halve the use of fossil fuels by 2020. The aim is to meet both national and EU-level standards. Finland, however, is different from the average EU country in a sense that heating costs in Finland are high but gas consumption low. The use of wood and other bioenergy sources as renewable forms of energy is common in Finland.

Ms. *Tuuli Ojala*, Climate, Environment and Hot Spots Adviser from International Barents Secretariat, shed light on the challenges and successes of the environmental cooperation in the Barents Region. Ms. Ojala said that Russia has hosted the Barents Euro-Arctic Council's environmental working group for the past two years and the cooperation has been active. Although environmental issues are challenging in the Barents Region, a number of so-called hot spots have been eliminated - in other words, the condition of some natural sites, which have been in an alarming state, has now improved. Ms. Ojala pointed out that environmental protection requires capital and investment and not even the Nordic countries take this always into account. However, the work in the Barents Region is innovative and the latest idea involves turning the power of storm waves into energy.

The last speaker of the second part-session was Mr. *Magnus Rystedt*, Managing Director from the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation. NEFCO has approximately 50% of its projects in the Barents Region. For instance, in Petrozavodsk and Kaliningrad they have implemented a project to build a waste treatment plant. In Novodvinsk, projects focused, among other things, on modernization of school buildings. Mr. Rystedt also reported that Russia has a new, stricter legislation regarding technology requirements in plants which, in turn, will also improve the protection of the environment.

Youth policy

The third and final day of the conference began with addresses given by regional parliamentary assemblies. The session was chaired by MP, Mr. *Juho Eerola*, Chair of the Finnish Delegation to the Nordic Council. Ms. *Tiina Sanila-Aikio*, President of the Sami Parliamentary Council, noted that the Barents Region is a traditional Sami residence. She told the audience about Nordic Sami agreement and the special report on indigenous peoples of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Ms. *Victoria Tauli-Corpuz*. Sami people's challenges relate to the industrialization of their habitat - the effects of climate change, oil and gas extraction as well as endangered, traditional livelihoods. Furthermore, Sami representatives' participation in international fora has more recently been more limited due to difficulties in obtaining funding. Ms. Sanila-Aikio also noted that the Sami Parliament is planning an initiative on global indigenous peoples and expressed her hope that Russia would establish its own Sami Parliament.

Ms. *Phia Andersson*, The Nordic Council representative, spoke about the Nordic Council's international connections more broadly and emphasized that the Russians should not be excluded from the regional

cooperation. She holds the Nordic welfare model as the best guarantee for the future.

Ms. *Giedrė Purvaneckienė*, President of the Assembly of the Baltic States, stressed the importance of connecting the Rail Baltica transport network in the Barents Region. In addition, she mentioned the Baltic countries' general meeting which will be held on 19-20 November in 2015 in Vilnius.

The last speech was given by Mr. *Kai Alajoki*, President of the Nordic Youth Council, who briefed the audience on the latest activities of the organisation and underlined the important role of the youth in the Barents Region as well as more widely in the development of the North.

The theme of the third session was the youth and future prospects in the Barents Region. The first part-session of this session focused especially on questions related to the youth of the Barents Region.

Ms. *Gry Paulgaard*, Professor at the Arctic University of Norway, highlighted the important effect birthplace has on opportunities and the lack of them for young people. She stressed that "we are what we are able to develop ourselves into." Ms. Paulgaard also held freedom and networking as important values for young people. She was particularly concerned about the fact that the percentage of school drop-outs seems to be higher in sparsely populated areas. Other challenges young people in the Barents Region face include long distances, sparse network of schools as well as a lack of employment and leisure opportunities at a time when current generation of youth, nicknamed the CV generation, is aware that "only by being the best you are good enough".

After Ms. Paulgaard, Ms. *Sunna Kokkonen*, Chairperson of the Barents Regional Youth Council spoke about the situation of young people in the Barents Region as well as the activities the Council organises for local young people. The Barents Regional Youth Council, i.e. BRYC organises various seminars, conferences and recreational camps for young people, as well as runs working groups which tackle youth related issues. Ms. Kokkonen said that the Council intends to make the activities as accessible as possible and to involve young people across the borders. The activities enhance mobility and employment in the region and develop young people's language skills and broaden their perspectives of the future. Ms. Kokkonen noted that recognition of the youth is particularly important in the development of the Barents Region because young people are open-minded in their approach towards developing society and the areas where they live.

According to MP, Mr. Eirik Sivertsen, from the Norwegian Parliament, Arctic issues have for a long time been at the very center of internal as well as external policy of Norway. He underlined, in particular, the crucial nature of P2P collaboration and stressed how important it is to continue the Barents cooperation also with Russia.

The second part-session of the third session revolved around the current and future cooperation in the Barents Region. The part-session was chaired by MP, Mr. *Pyry Niemi* from the Swedish Parliament.

The last part-session was intended to provide an overview of the initiatives and projects initiated by Finland and Arkhangelsk Oblast which serve as the current chairmanships of the Barents cooperation. At the same time were presented the priorities and focus areas of the upcoming chairmanships, the Russian Federation and the Kainuu region.

The first speakers represented the current and upcoming chairmanships at the national level in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. Ms. *Marja-Leena Vuorenpää*, Barents Ambassador of Finland, presented the priority areas and projects launched during the Finnish chairmanship. Priorities have been economic cooperation, transport and logistics, environment and climate change as well as youth cooperation. The upcoming chairmanship of the Russian Federation was presented by Mr. *Sergey Petrovich*, Barents Ambassador of Russian Federation. The principles of the Russian chairmanship will be: "Trust, Transparency, Tradition". During its chairmanship, Russia will continue the work on many of the areas the Finnish chairmanship had prioritized and will place particular emphasis on cooperation in the fields of economy, environment and tourism. Russia will also pay attention to indigenous peoples' opportunities to

participate in the Barents cooperation.

The discussion then moved on to issues concerning the Barents cooperation at regional level and the current and forthcoming chairmanships of the Barents Regional Committee. Mr. *Alexey G. Kalinin*, the current Chair of the Barents Regional Committee, spoke about the cooperation exercised within the framework of regional cooperation during the chairmanship of Arkhangelsk Oblast region. The last speaker, MP, Mr. *Timo Korhonen* from the Finnish Parliament, addressed the forthcoming chairmanship of Kainuu region in the Regional Committee.

The closing remarks of the conference were given by Mr. *Peter Stenlund*, Secretary of State from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. Mr. Stenlund summarized the main objectives of the Finnish chairmanship and stressed the meaning of the Barents and Arctic region cooperation as well as the importance of the Barents cooperation at parliamentary level.