



**Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation**  
Secretariat for EU and International Affairs

## Minutes from the WGEC meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2019 in Stockholm, Sweden

### Welcome and introduction (Jointly with the RWGIEC)

The Chair, Mr Tomas Dahlman welcomed the WGEC as well as the RWGIEC to the third meeting under the Swedish chairmanship and invited the participants introduced themselves. No additions were made to the agenda.

The Chair then invited the chair of the RWGIEC, Ms Jenny Spring to say a few words. Ms Spring noted that there had been challenges for the group in the past and that the work of last year was focused on recruiting new members. Ms Spring also informed the group that the regional mandate was adopted but also that there was a need to work on a new mandate for the future.

### Presentation of the work of the CSO, Eva Ekmehag, Min. of Foreign Affairs

Ms Eva Ekmehag from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave an update on the Swedish chairmanship and the work in the CSO (for more information please see the ppt). She confirmed that the Barents cooperation was important in a difficult situation security wise and that the ambition of the Swedish chairmanship was to reach tangible results. She also informed the WGEC and the RWGIEC that Norway would take over the chairmanship in October in Umeå – back to back with EU-Arctic forum. Other events that were mentioned was the Regional Council Meeting in Tromsø on the 3d of April. Ms Ekmehag underlined that there were many areas where concrete action could be envisioned. In the area of tourism for example, the groups on economy, transport, environment, indigenous people etc, had converging ambitions. Ms Ekmehag also underlined the

importance of communicating the work and reminded the group of the Communications Strategy. Norway wanted more information on the activities in relations to the strategy. Ms Ekmehag gave some examples and the Chair promised to send out the strategy to the group.

Mr Leif Ehrsten representing Finland wanted to know how active the groups were. Ms Ekmehag noted that the level of activities differed.

The WGEC and RWGIEC then broke of from the meeting for separate sessions.

#### **Mandate (presentation, discussion and adoption)/Future activities – brainstorming**

The Chair presented the mandate section by section. A slight amendment was made in para 7 where the word sector was added after the word business to make the sentence more readable. The WGEC also underlined that para 2 was not an exhaustive list of groups to collaborate with, but rather examples.

The mandate was then adopted. The Chair informed the WGEC that the mandate would then go through to the CSO for final approval.

The Chair then invited the participants to contribute to a brainstorming on areas or activities that could become concrete outcomes of the mandate. The Chair mentioned the forest sector and tourism as such areas but also underlined that the regional group was more suited for concrete actions and that the national group should support regional group. Ms Erika A Vartdal, representing Norway informed the WGEC that Norway would have three priorities – health cooperation (eHealth), people-to-people cooperation and knowledge, research and youth. Norway was aiming at involving private health innovation industry and clusters on e-health. Norway was also planning to publish a White Paper on the Health Industry during the spring of 2019. A Barents Ministerial meeting on health and social issues was planned for the 12<sup>th</sup> of November in Oslo to kick-start the chairmanship. Norway also planned to facilitate an event in 2020 on working group level.

The Chair informed about the Swedish strategic programs where areas such as Life science/One health/AMR/Involvement of the business sector were declared as main focus. The use of the White Paper was suggested as a beneficial platform for Barents.

Finland highlighted the topic of sustainable tourism as important and underlined that tourism has increased. The Arctic Sea Route has come more and more into play. Sustainable mining and sustainable aquaculture (increasing area) were also of interest. Black carbon emission was the focus of the Finnish president. The St Petersburg International Arctic Conference would be held on the 9-10th of April and focus on this. Modernisation projects to reduce emissions were being launched in Murmansk and Karelen among others.

The Chair noted that aquaculture could be common ground for Norway and reminded the group that a session was held in Haparanda on carbon free steel emission.

Ms Ekmeahg wondered about the platform for youth entrepreneurs that was mentioned in the mandate and the Chair of the youth group, Ms Lotta Jarvenius Rössner promised to bring it up in her presentation.

Norway was keen that the group would not replicate already existing work but to draw synergies. The Chair agreed that a realistic approach had to be applied and underlined again that the WGEC does not work on concrete projects.

Norway was positive to having meetings back to back with other events.

Ms Ekmeahg underlined the work of the WGEC would provide good basis for Norway to move forward. The Chair agreed that continuity was important as well as good contacts with the regional level.

The Chair asked for information on upcoming events and Norway informed the WGEC that the government would be represented at the International Arctic Forum in St. Petersburg in April. In May, there would be a meeting in the Working Group for Regional and Cross-Border issues between Norway and Russia. This group aims to meet at political level every year. The Working Group is part of the Norwegian-Russian Intergovernmental Commission on Economic, Industrial and Scientific-Technical cooperation.

Ms Ekmeahg informed the group on the Summit of indigenous people congress 26-28th of May. The Swedish Minister of Culture would hopefully participate. Ms Ekmeahg also informed the WGEC of the meeting between First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Mr

Vladimir G. Titov and State Secretary Annika Söder to be held on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March.

The Chair informed the WGEC that there were no decisions on a fourth meeting of the WGEC under the Swedish Chairmanship. It was also a question of the needs of members. Suggestions were welcome by the group and the Chair promised to continue discussions with Norway.

The Chair of the youth group, Lotta Jarvenius Rössner highlighted that the regional level works well, but the national level was difficult and that there was a need to restart the working group. They were in the same phase as WGEC regarding the mandate. The youth group would participate in Tromsø 4th of April, but the next meeting is still to be confirmed

Ms Ekmeahag underlined that the CSO wanted to invite the groups and meet.

#### **Business Sweden**

The RWGIEC rejoined the meeting and Ms Francisca Herodes from Business Sweden was invited to present their work (see ppt). Ms Herodes welcomed future collaboration. She noted the need to be attractive as a region first and then the necessity for competition.

#### **Youth Group: presentation and discussion of possible joint activities**

Ms Lotta Jarvenius Rössner gave a briefing of the work of the youth group and highlighted possible areas of collaboration (see ppt). She also underlined that all groups should make sure to include a youth perspective. Ms Jarvenius Rössner also mentioned the difficulties to gather on a national level and raised the question of how we could work and come together on this issue. A great interest to develop but with severe and limited resources.

The new EU Youth Strategy was also discussed and framed by engagement, connection and empowerment of the youth. Ideas for youth projects included to engage an attractive region and create a platform for young entrepreneurs through internships, digital infrastructure and to raise awareness.

Ms Spring, the Chair of the RWGIEC added to the discussion on youth by introducing the *Cool Enough Challenge* which she hoped would be shared with other groups networks.

### Wrap up (summaries from the chairs)

In her summary from the discussion on in the RWGIEC, Ms Spring noted that the countries in the region faced similar challenges, among others to attract youth. She also underlined that it was positive to have had the meeting together with the WGEC. Mr Dahlman, the Chair of the WGEC, summed up by saying that the groups had now closer ties and that he hoped this would lead to concrete activities. Also, the work of other groups should be taken into account. He also highlighted a concrete outcome of the meeting namely that the group now had adopted the mandate.

The meeting was then adjourned and a study visit to Smart City Sweden was undertaken.