



Protocol of Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation

Date: 6 March 2012, at 10.00-15.00 (local time)

Venue: Scandic Hotel, Rovaniemi, Finland.

Attendees:

Kjell Hjelm, Swedish Federation of Business Owners, Norrbotten, Sweden
Torbjörn Halvardsson, Swedish Federation of Business Owners, Västerbotten, Sweden
Matti Kankaanranta, Organisation of SME-enterprises in Western Lapland, Finland
Jorma Teittinen, Joint Authority of Kainuu Region, Finland
Anniken Mordal, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Norway
Irina Nazarova, International Barents Secretariat (IBS), Norway
Brynnolf Tjärner, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, Sweden
Sari Roininen, County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, Sweden

Not attending:

Sergey Mikhailovich Averin, Ministry of Economic Development in the Arkhangelsk Region, Russia
Illka Yliniemi, Development Director, Council of Oulu Region, Finland
Trond Skotvold, Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, Troms, Norway

Agenda:

- 1. Opening of the meeting** The chair opens the meeting and brief presentations of the attending members were made.
- 2. Adoption of the agenda.** Some additions to the agenda were made. Anniken Mordal was included to present the work of the national working group on economic cooperation (WGEC) in item 5. And a presentation of a new project idea was included in item 8.
- 3. Election of secretary and adjuster of the protocol.** Sari Roininen were chosen as secretary and Matti Kankaanranta as adjuster.
- 4. Previous meeting and protocol.** The protocol from the previous meeting was adopted. Also the annual report to BEAC was adopted.
- 5. Report from group members – business/investments/difficulties.** Anniken Mordal announced that the next meeting of WGEC will take place in Oslo the 12th of April 2012, and that the regional working group is welcome to participate. During this meeting a draft of priorities will be presented. Also cooperation between the national and regional working groups could be discussed.

Martti informed about an enterprise trip to Murmansk the 31st of March. About 10 business executives from Helsinki and Kemi/Tornio will visit Opora, an organization for small and medium sized companies (SMEs). The aim of the trip is to learn how to make operations in Russia. Martti also told that the project of Barents business council (Barents företagarråd) is ending 31st of July 2012. The aim of this project was to help small companies to make businesses by cross-border collaboration. The partners are Bedriftsförbundet in Norway, Länsipohjan Yrittäjät in Finland, and Företagarna Norrbotten in Sweden. Another current project in Finland is an ENPI project called Young innovative entrepreneurs.

Jorma informed that many SMEs in Kainuu nearly have no contact with Russian companies. However, 5 metal industry owners get during a 3 year period consultation/mentoring from a firm in Oulu in how to manage these types of contacts. They learn of risks and the situation on the market and acquire more knowledge. A new diamond mine is starting in Kainuu (Talvivaara mine), and uranium will be sent to Canada.

Torbjörn informed about cooperation between the county of Västerbotten in Sweden and the Chamber of commerce in Petrozavodsk, Russia. Recently they had a steering group meeting. Swedish companies find it difficult to cooperate with Russian companies and that the regulations are quite tough. There are a lot of natural resources in Petrozavodsk and a great interest from both parties to develop more relations between companies. It could, however, be easier to manage the relationships if the universities on both sides were involved in this cooperation.

Kjell reminds the group to also recognize the cooperation between the Nordic countries. Although there is a cultural problem cooperating with Russia, there also are some cultural difficulties in export and import issues between Sweden, Finland and Norway. A tool to facilitate cooperation between SMEs in the Barents region is the Partnerbook, which is an internet based community started in 2011.

(<https://www.partnerbook.fi/>) This website is owned by Digipolis, a development company in Kemi/Tornio, used most by the Finnish companies, but it could be developed into a Nordic partnerbook.

The focus in business should be shifted from a north/south direction to an east/west direction as was the case in former times. We have, however, a transport and logistic problem today. Partnerbook could be developed and used as a resource for business, transport and other important and concrete issues.

6. Information from Brynolf Tjärner

Brynolf informed of the content in the chairmanship program 2011-2013. Although there are a lot of issues to work with in the regional Barents cooperation, the chairmanship in Norrbotten County will especially focus on raw materials, youth, and promoting Barents region and cooperation.

In 13-15th of June there will be a youth workshop. This event will hopefully result in important input for the development of a forthcoming regional Barents program and a Kirkenes declaration II. The perspective of youth is important to integrate in future cooperation in order to develop the region.

In 4-5 September the chairmanship will also arrange a milieu forum where industry meets policy makers, investors, and students on both regional and national level. The

content will be on value creation at large in Barents region, energy and energy efficiency, and adapting communities.

Some interesting events will soon take place:

- 27th of May the opening of the new office for cross-border hindrances (Gränshinderkontoret) will occur in Haparanda/Tornio,
- 20-21st of March a workshop in Losby Gods, outside Oslo, will take place dealing with an action plan of climate change.
- 14-15th of June an annual convent called Barents Reunion will go on in Haparanda/Tornio. The basis of the convent is to facilitate people-to-people cooperation in the Barents region. The theme varies every year and this year it is about sustainability. It is in connection with this event that the youth workshop mentioned above will take place.

7. Action plan, important issues.

Irina informs about the personnel at IBS. Irina works with financing issues and will also work with information on hotspots in the future. Ari Sirén is the new head of IBS, and the organisation might also work with more analytical tasks in the future.

When it comes to the action plan of RWGIE Irina reads a letter from Ari to the group which says the plan is a good start. It could though be more concrete and concentrated on issues on the regional level. Custom and visa issues lie more on a national level. The plan also lacks a Russian aspect. The group then had discussions on this message and declared that a regional level with concrete problems such as custom and other cross-border issues is highly important for the national group on economic cooperation to consider in their work. Therefore the group will continue the work accordingly to the action plan. However, the action plan might be revised to be more clear and understandable to others.

Irina gave tips on how to form a project and what to think about. With these in mind the group will form a project on a manual considering cross-border hindrances, difficulties and other things to take into account when making business with each other in the Barents region.

8. Any other business.

Kjell presented a project that could be of interest for this working group. The project is called "Barents Event Cooperation" and incorporates entrepreneurship with sports. The idea of the project is to combine sports with business and academic studies. In this way you could create young entrepreneurs that are used to work cross-border and internationally. Although the working group cannot engage in this project it supports this idea, and Irina could try to help them with their application of finance. The project also needs connections and cooperation with companies which could be mediated by the members of RWGIE.

The working group came to the decision that this project was not a priority at the moment. Instead the group will work with the development of a manual where Partnerbook could be used to distribute the manual. Sari, Kjell and Irina will start with developing a project description and send it to the members of the working group. Committing partners, a time schedule and a budget is necessary to be settled before applying for finance. One possible financier is the North Calotte Council with 50 percent of the amount.

9. Next meeting.

Brussels is not possible as planned due to the Open days that are already filled up. Instead the meeting will be at the Swedish Federation of Business Owners (Företagarna) in Luleå, 3 September 2012, at 12 o'clock. The meeting will start with a lunch.

10. Closing of the meeting.