

Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC)

Report from the Norwegian chairmanship 2011-2013

Priorities for the Norwegian Chairmanship of WGEC 2011-2013

The Norwegian chairmanship of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) based its priorities for the period 2011-2013 on the priorities of the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) 2011-2013.

The overarching theme for the Norwegian chairmanship period was “*A resource-rich region in Europe*”. In line with this, the Norwegian priorities for the WGEC focused in particular on topics and activities that were thought to have an impact on enhancing the economic potential of the region’s vast resources. In response to the call from the foreign ministers, climate change played an integral part of the work of the working group.

During the Norwegian chairmanship of WGEC there was a particular focus on new possibilities for increased economic cooperation between the member states in the following areas:

- 1) Maritime traffic in the Arctic Ocean
- 2) Mineral Sector
- 3) Cross-border business cooperation
- 4) Collaborate with other teams in the Barents Council and other regional structures

Activities and initiatives accomplished during the chairmanship, related to the prioritized areas:

Maritime traffic in the Arctic Ocean:

- The Northern Sea Route was one of the main topics at the meeting of the working group May 2013. The Norwegian Shipowners’ association introduced the topic by giving a presentation of their strategy.
- “Scenarios for future shipping routes” was also one of the main topics at the Barents Industrial Partnership meeting in May 2013 with four speakers introducing the theme.

Mineral sector:

- The Norwegian chairmanship was co-arranger at a seminar on rights of indigenous peoples and development of economic resources, including minerals, in the Barents region in Tromsø in September 2012.
- Management of Barents resources, with a special focus on the mineral resources was one of the main topics at the Barents Industrial partnership meeting May 2013 with four speakers introducing the theme.
- The Norwegian government’s mineral strategy was presented at the meeting of the WGEC October 2013.

Cross-border business cooperation:

- A study on economic cooperation in the Barents Region from 2003-2012 was commissioned by the Norwegian chairmanship. Akvaplan-niva performed the study

and wrote a report. Findings from the report were presented at the Barents Industrial Partnership Meeting May 2013 and at the meeting of the WGEC May 2013.

- A short summary of the study on economic cooperation in the Barents Region, together with recommendations from the study, were forwarded to the Barents Euro-Arctic Committee of Senior Officials from the Working Group on Economic Cooperation. Together with this, the WGEC requested to notify the ministers of foreign affairs about the findings and recommendations from the studies to draw the ministers of foreign affairs' attention to potential for economic cooperation.

Crosscutting cooperation

- Cooperation with Steering Committee for the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area (BEATA) and the BEAC Working Group on Environmental issues in the preparations to the Barents Industrial Partnership Meeting
- The WGEC contributed to the work on the Action Plan on Climate Change.
- The WGEC contributed to the new declaration from 2013 supporting the Kirkenes Declaration from 1993
- Close cooperation with the BEAC Working Group on Indigenous Peoples on the seminar on indigenous peoples and extractive mining

Relevant for all topics:

- Barents Industrial Partnership Meeting 2013
The key topic for the conference was cross-border business cooperation, but several of the priorities of the Norwegian chairmanship were addressed at the conference: 1) maritime traffic in the Arctic Ocean, 2) the mineral sector, 3) cross-border business cooperation, and 4) cross-cutting cooperation.

The purpose of the conference was to discuss challenges and opportunities related to the priority areas, exchange information and experiences among the member states, businesses and academia, and identify opportunities for increased cooperation. The conference involved participants from ministries, businesses and academia from the member states.

Calendar of events during the Norwegian chairmanship

12 April 2012: First meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation, held back to back with the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Business and Industry – Nordic Council of Ministers

Venue: Oslo

10 September 2012: Participation and co-arranger at the seminar on indigenous peoples and extractive (mining) industries

Venue: Tromsø

29 November 2012: Second meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation

Venue: Oslo

13 May 2013: Third meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation

Venue: Tromsø

14 May 2013: Barents Industrial Partnership Meeting: Conference on economic cooperation in the Barents Region.

Venue: Tromsø

9 October 2013: Fourth meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation

Venue: Oslo