



Priorities for the Finnish Chairmanship of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) 2013-2015

The Finnish chairmanship of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) bases its priorities on the priorities of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) 2013-2015.

The Finnish Chairmanship has three guiding principles in its work for the dynamic, inclusive and sustainable development of the Barents region:

COHERENCE

The impact of regional cooperation could be strengthened by increased cooperation between the different processes and actors. The Finnish Chairmanship will seek new ways to cooperate in relevant sectors with the Northern Dimension and the other regional cooperation councils, the Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Nordic Council of Ministers. The ENI Cross-Border Cooperation programmes in the region could be further aligned to the Barents cooperation.

COOPERATION

Cooperation will be enhanced, paying special attention to the improvement of the communication and connections between various stakeholders in the Barents region. Moreover, closer cooperation between different Barents working groups will be encouraged. As chair of the WGEC, Finland intends to cooperate with other working groups, such as the Working Group on Environment, the Steering Committee for the Barents Euro-Arctic Pan-European Transport Area (BEATA), the Joint Working Group on Energy (JEWG) and the Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT).

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council Chairmanship in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (Helsinki) and the International Barents Secretariat (IBS) in Norway (Kirkenes) are important partners for the work in the WGEC.

CONTINUITY

The Finnish Chairmanship will build on the work of the previous Chairs and on the guidelines set by the Kirkenes Summit Declaration of 2013. The challenges linked to extractive industries, transport connections and climate change continue to be high on the agenda. The active participation of the indigenous peoples in Barents cooperation will be encouraged.

Priorities of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) 2013-2015:

ECONOMIC COOPERATION, INCLUDING TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS

- Intensify economic and business cooperation to help to unlock the full economic potential of the region
- Promote sustainable mining and knowledge of clean technology
- Take further measures to strengthen the mobility and accessibility of the region, including follow-up of the Joint Barents Transport Plan

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

- Promote the environmental sustainability of all economic and industrial activities
- Start implementation of BEAC Action Plan on Climate Change

YOUTH

- Enhance cooperation in the field of youth participation and social inclusion
- Promote equal opportunities for education and work as well as youth mobility

OTHER IMPORTANT AREAS OF COOPERATION

The Finnish Chairmanship will also work to promote tourism, cultural cooperation, health and social well-being, as well as emergency and rescue cooperation. The possibility of establishing a financing mechanism for the Region will be investigated.

Priorities of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) 2013-2015:

The Barents region is going through major economic, environmental and social changes due to climate change and the increased demand for natural resources such as oil, gas and minerals. In addition, the gradual opening of the Northern Sea Route gives the region new economic prospects.

Finland is determined to promote economic cooperation and people-to-people contacts across borders. The accessibility of the region is a necessary precondition for dynamic economic development and mobility.

Nature in the Barents region is unique and vulnerable. Regional cooperation can contribute to minimizing the negative effects of climate change. We must ensure that all economic activities take into consideration the environmental impacts and the interests of the people living in the region, including the indigenous peoples.

During the Finnish chairmanship of WGEC we will have a particular focus on possibilities for increased economic cooperation between the member states in the following areas:

CLEANTECH KNOWLEDGE

With the increasing economic activity and growing industry, the environment in the Barents regions is subjected to greater strains and thus utilities need to be developed. Environmental sustainability in the field of economic cooperation can be promoted through the development of cleantech. While bringing solutions to global environmental challenges, such as environmental degradation, climate change, and the scarcity of resources, cleantech improves the competitiveness of industry and services through the efficient use of materials and energy.

Finland promotes knowledge of cleantech in the areas of **energy efficiency, energy saving, maritime industry, water and waste water management**. The Barents region offers major opportunities for cleantech expertise and companies engaged in this line of business, especially in the fields of energy efficiency of residential and industrial buildings, emission cuts, fuel economy and bio-fuels, water treatment, as well as modernization of waste management and removal of dumps.

Activities:

- Cleantech Summit (including special session for sustainable mineral industry in the Barents region)

Expected results:

- Intensified business to business co-operation
- Growth of the regional cleantech know-how

SUSTAINABLE MINERAL INDUSTRY

The expanding mining industry is an opportunity for increased economical activity and livelihood at the Barents Region. The Barents Region has potential for extraction of base metals and also for many critical minerals for the European industry. Utilization of natural resources in hard and vulnerable Arctic environment is challenging. Additionally influence on other businesses and local communities have to be considered. Today key issues in mining are also **productivity, water and waste management, development of new products from tailings and long-term research and monitoring of the environmental impacts**. More information is essential for consolidation of conflicting interests and for development of sustainable mining sector at Barents conditions.

Finland aims at environmentally, socially and economically sustainable extractive industry and enhances this development by implementing the action plan "Making Finland a leader in the sustainable extractive industry". Finland contributes to sustainable mining also by advocating and sharing the practices outlined e.g. in the guides "Best Environmental Practices in Metal Mining Operations", "Exploration in protected areas, the Sámi homeland and the reindeer managing area" and "Environmental Impact Assessment (2014)". International co-operation, exchange of information and experiences between enterprises, research organizations and public sector operators are encouraged and essential in obtaining targets.

Synergy gains by combining resources and strengths can be achieved in research, education, development and business operations. Continuous dialogue within the

Barents region is vital for identification of key focus areas and relevant partners as well as follow-up of the actions taken.

Finland highlights the growing need of the expanding mining and the oil and gas industries to develop **transportation and logistics** in the Barents area. Many potential investment and transportation projects involve a cross-border dimension. The regional transport needs have been evaluated in the “Joint Barents Transportation Plan” – Finnish Chairmanship supports the follow-up of this joint exercise.

Activities:

- Cleantech Summit (including special session for sustainable mineral industry in the Barents region)
- “Finnish-Russian Arctic Mining Initiative” (project coordinated by the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy and funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs)

Expected results:

- Intensified business to business co-operation
- Collaborative projects of the extractive industry actors in the Barents region

CROSS-BORDER BUSINESS COOPERATION

In order to strengthen the cross-border business cooperation, the Finnish chairmanship will promote initiatives for increased cooperation between business organisations and between young entrepreneurs in the Barents region. This will be carried out together with the regional authorities as regional involvement is crucial.

Activities:

- Cooperation with Barents Business Advisory Group (BBAG) and Chambers of Commerce
- Barents Industrial Partnership seminar

Expected results:

- Intensified business-to-business cooperation

The Finnish WGEC Presidency also supports the work done in The Barents Forest Sector Network which is an administrative part of working group. The aim of the network is to promote sustainable management of forest resources, to follow and timely contribute to BEAC activities, to advocate balanced and coherent view on forests as well as on products and services they provide.

Tentative calendar of events

- **September 2014:** First meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation. Presentation of the priorities of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) 2013-2015.
Venue: Helsinki/Finland
- **April-May 2015:** Second meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation.
Venue: Helsinki/Finland
- **September 2015:** Cleantech Summit (including special session for sustainable mineral industry in the Barents region)
Venue: Helsinki/Finland
- **September 2015:** Third meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (back-to-back with Cleantech Summit).
Venue: Helsinki/Finland
- **October 2015:** Barents Industrial Partnership seminar (back-to-back with BEAC Foreign Ministers' Meeting)
Venue: Oulu/Finland (tbc)

Contact information

Chair of the Working Group:

Ministerial Adviser: Mr. Petri Haapalainen

Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy

e-mail: petri.haapalainen@tem.fi, tel: +358 40 592 2667

Member/secretary of the Working Group:

Senior Adviser: Ms. Tuulia Väliheikki

Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy

e-mail: tuulia.valiheikki@tem.fi , tel: +358 50 461 9080