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Report from the meeting of the WGEC on the 26th of June 2018

Main conclusions:

- The WGEC decided to work more closely with the Regional Working Group on Economic Cooperation. This includes back to back or joint meetings as well as agreeing on a common mandate.
- The WGEC decided it would be preferable to arrange the meetings of the group in conjunction with other events such as the Murmansk business week or other events as appropriate.
- The WGEC agreed that the Chairs of the national and regional WGEC:s would work together on a draft mandate.
- The WGEC also highlighted the benefits of applying a long term approach, choosing a unifying topic, and developing a roadmap as a way forward. The role of the WGEC as a facilitator for the work of other groups was also underlined.

Welcome and introduction

Mr Tomas Dahlman, Chair of the WGEC introduced the agenda and informed the WGEC that the Nordic Council of Ministers program on bio-economy was scheduled to be approved on the 27th of June and would be sent out to delegates. Delegates introduced themselves and the agenda was adopted without amendments.

Barents 2050 – Impacts, opportunities, and risks of climate change and climate change mitigation

Mr Tomi Lindroos from the WTT Technical Research Center of Finland presented the Barents 2050 study, paying particular attention to economic aspects of applying a sustainable approach. The study provided some basic facts about the Barents economies and concluded that the current approaches were more likely to achieve a 3 percent increased temperature rather than the aim of the Paris Agreement of 2 percent. Mr Lindroos proceeded by giving examples of opportunities and challenges of different sectors in this regard - electricity, transport, oil and gas, production industry - but the report itself also looks at other sectors such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

For more information please consult the PPT and the report.

Sustainable production of steel

Ms Eva Blixt from Jernkontoret gave a presentation about their work in the area of sustainability and explained to the WGEC the vision and goals of the company and how they “Agenda 2030”- proofed the work. Jernkontoret has also developed an Agenda 2030 compass which can be used as a guide for choosing a method of work, revealing goal conflicts and possible goal achievements. Ms Blixt then proceeded by explaining the Hybrit-project which, if successful will lead to fossil free steel production.

See PPT for more information.

Barents Case Study – Towards Green Economics in the Barents region

Mr Vladimir Masloboev from the Kola Science Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences presented some of the work of the center based on the positive interplay between environment and economy and its potential for growth. Mr Masloboev pointed to biotechnology as the basis for this and gave a number of examples of the results of the center in this field, as well as giving examples of what sectors could be of interest for bio-economy in the Barents region (windpower, mining, aquaculture/mariculture etc.)

Mr Vladimir Dimitriev proceeded by explaining the work within the framework of the Boreal collaboration in defining bio-economy and it's connection to the SDG:s. Mr Dimitriev informed the WGEC that the parties have found a definition that everyone agrees with that has a balance

between economy and biotechnology. All countries have their own specificities but the uniting factor are the global goals. The WGEC was informed about the Russian State Program for Biotechnology Development in RU until 2020. It includes biotechnological platforms (Medicine of the Future, Bio-industry and Bio-resources, Bioenergy) as well as strategic goals. Examples of achievements are for instance in certification och classification and in phytosanitary control (seedlings). Another important sector that was pointed out by Mr Dimitriev was bio-materials in construction.

See PPT:s for more information

Report from the meeting of the Barents Forest Sector Network

Mr Staffan Norin reported the results of the meeting of the BFSN that was held on the 13th -14th of June. One of the preliminary inputs from the BFSN to the WGEC is to focus on work in the field of wood construction. Mr Norin also presented the preliminary roadmap of the BFSN culminating in a Forest Forum at the end of 2019.

See PPT for more information.

The role of the WGEC – discussion of mandate

The Chair explained that all Barents groups have been given the task to fill in a mandate template. The template had been sent out in advance along with questions to help guide the discussion.

Ms Jenny Spring, chair of the RWGEC from the Norwegian Barents Secretariat highlighted that there was a challenge at regional level because there were no activities in the group. Her first mission as chair was now to recruit new members. Ms Spring suggested that it would be a good idea to merge the RWGEC and the WGEC having one common mandate.

The Chair mentioned that this discussion was held in Moscow and decided to keep the groups, but work closer.

Ms Ine Charlott Paulsen, Norway, supported the idea of the two groups merging or working close together and asked what is the role of the group and what the group's main task should be. Ms Paulsen acknowledged that there had not been much substance in the group but that it had served as a platform for exchange of information, without further follow up. Ms

Paulsen agreed with Sweden on the idea of a topic that all can contribute to and that can provide a long term perspective to the group. Good to merge – because work is done at regional level.

Mr. Rafael Usubov, Russia, agreed in general with the proposal to make the groups work close together or merge them, but expressed some hesitation because regional groups are mostly engaged into cross-border cooperation and projects while national groups should seek to have larger overarching projects. In his view one of the main objectives of the WGEC is preparation of researches, overviews, pre-feasibility studies and some other projects including large-scale ones. At the same time he added that the work of the group should be focused perhaps on the attempts to turn the ideas expressed during the presentations in a practical way - in project proposals. With this in mind, an ideas' selection process should be launched so that the ideas expressed and once selected could be assessed by the group members and their relevant national field ministries and organizations. He wanted to move in this direction. Mr Usubov believed the WGEC could be inspired by the BFSN and could consider making a similar roadmap. Mr Usubov also expressed his appreciation that the meeting had been rich in topics (perhaps short).

Ms Spring expressed concerns with the idea of the WGEC launching projects and questioned the availability of capacity in terms of project management and financial possibilities. Mr Usubov believed this could be solved by inviting other implementing actors (institutes for instance) as well as making use of existing funding schemes.

Mr Petri Haapalainen, Finland, agreed there were benefits in intensifying collaboration with regional groups and was supportive of this idea. Mr Haapalainen reminded the WGEC that funding could be available via the EU.

The Chair also felt it was a good idea to provide rich content to the meetings by providing relevant presentations but also pointed to the question on how to make things concrete. One way forward could be that WGEC has an umbrella role and that different groups targeting different areas are tied to the work and could follow up on bio-economy, steel industry. Networks of experts could be set up. Regional level closer to work.

Ms Marija Milivojevic asked the regional representatives on how the WGEC could be of use to the regional level?

Ms Spring identified the lack of money as the main obstacle and suggested the WGEC could help provide the setting for meetings, or organize meetings as side events to bigger conferences.

Mr Usubov asked about the status of the groups if a merger between national and regional level would take place. The Chair underlined that the process was not there yet – one could consider two formal groups but in closer cooperation. Mr Roman Gokkoev from The Barents secretariat mentioned that the group on Environment already does this.

Mr Haapalainen suggested the Murmansk business week and the Arctic Forum in Archangelsk as possible events for meetings, and also suggested that the later could provide a good study opportunity in the fields of bio-economy.

Mr Michael Bergström from the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten reminded the group that the national and regional working groups on Transport always meet together and that in their case the regional group is the implementing actor and the national gives ideas and assignments. Mr Bergström underlined that it is easier for regional groups to work if they are mandated by the national groups.

Ms Spring underlined that it would be a good idea to consider already ongoing projects and how the WGEC could contribute to them. The Chair underlined that the role of the WGEC could be to provide the link to governments and business community.

Chair concluded by proposing that the two Chairs would work out a proposal considering for example the idea of placing meetings in connection to bigger events.

Ms Milivojevic informed the WGEC on how the work would be taken forward after the meeting. The Chair would send out a filled in draft mandate, taking the discussion into account. A deadline for comments would be provided as well as information on a tentative new meeting.

As final addition to the meeting, Mr Bergström, who is also a member of the Youth Working Group, encouraged the WGEC to involve youth more in the work and advise the Youth Working Group on how to work with youth issues the WGEC area of competence.