



## **Priorities for the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) 2011-2013**

The Norwegian chairmanship of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) bases its priorities for 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 is "A *resource-rich region in Europe*". In line with this, the Norwegian priorities for the WGEC will focus in particular on topics and activities we believe will have an impact on enhancing the economic potential of the region's vast resources. Responding to the call from the Ministers of foreign affairs, climate change considerations will be an integral part of the work of the WGEC.

The chairmanship will also support initiatives that promote closer cooperation between WGEC and other relevant working groups and regional structures. The Norwegian Barents Secretariat and The International Barents Secretariat (IBS) in Kirkenes are important partners for the work in the WGEC.

### ***Priorities of the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) 2011-2013:***

The Barents region is a region that increasingly attracts international attention. It is a region with vast resources - both human and natural - and a great potential for new economic development. During its chairmanship Norway intends to highlight and promote the Barents region as *a resource-rich region in Europe*.

The Norwegian chairmanship will work for continuity and adaptability, with three main priorities: 1) Sustainable economic and industrial development; 2) Environmentally safe and climate friendly development based on knowledge ; and 3) The human dimension.

### ***Priorities of the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) 2011-2013:***

The Barents Region will continue to grow in importance, to us and the rest of the world, because of what are our most valuable comparative advantages - the proximity to vast natural resources and the availability of highly qualified business and research institutions.

Realisation of the Barents Region's potential requires knowledge, a combination of natural-based advantages, bright minds and smart policy-making, and cooperation across industries and across borders.

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

### Maritime traffic in the Arctic Ocean

The receding ice in the Arctic makes it possible to consider new shipping routes. While opening up a host of challenges, this also opens for new opportunities for economic growth and industrial development. Destination traffic in the area is generally characterized by ships transporting goods and equipment into the area and natural resources out of the area. There are indications that freight volume from this destination traffic will continue to increase over the coming years. It has also been an increase in cruise tourism in the Polar regions. In the longer term we foresee transit traffic between the continents. Our aim is to ensure that ships can operate safely and prevent damages to the environment from shipping in the Polar areas. We need additional knowledge and expertise concerning shipping in the Arctic. This includes the development of specialised vessels and rigs adapted to working on the northern latitude, operational expertise and technology, and quality and skills for seafarers.

Activities:

- **The Norwegian Chairmanship will organise a meeting on the Northern Sea Route, to exchange information and discuss practical experiences.**

### Mineral sector

The development in mineral and metal prices worldwide has led to a renewed interest in the mining sector, including in the Barents region. The Fennoscandian Shield comprises a diversity of geological settings containing large resources of mineral deposits, and the Barents Region is one of the most important sources for metals and minerals in Europe. The potential is significant. In this context, geological surveys and other public institutions hold a key position in providing the industry and decision-makers with information and knowledge. Today the surveys cooperate closely on providing a common knowledge platform on the mineral resources, as exemplified by the Metallic Mineral Deposits Map of the Fennoscandian Shield and the Fennoscandian Ore Deposit Database (FODD).

Activities:

- **During the chairmanship, Norway will organize a conference focusing on economic cooperation in the Barents Region with special emphasis on the opportunities for cross border cooperation in the mineral sector.**
- **During 2012, a national Norwegian mineral strategy will be presented.**
- **January 2013, participation and input at a seminar on Best Environmental Practices in the metal mining sector in Barents region (Northern Finland).**

### Marine bioprospecting

Marine bioprospecting aims to explore marine genetic material. This activity may procure different compounds with a wide range of applications. Even though oceans cover more than 70 percent of the Earth's surface, the abundance of marine organisms has still not been adequately explored. The High North and the Barents region have access to unique Arctic marine organisms, marine industries, expertise and research infrastructure. The potential for new and sustainable wealth growth is substantial. Collaboration in the Barents region will be of great importance.

Activities:

- **The Norwegian chairmanship intends to arrange a seminar on marine bioprospecting in Tromsø in the course of the chairmanship**

Cross-border business cooperation

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

Activities:

- **Cooperation with the Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation (RWGIEC).**
- **Identify how trade councils, business organization and others view industrial and economic development in the Barents Region.**

Cross-cutting cooperation

As chair of the WGEC, Norway intends to cooperate closely 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 chairmanship will also support initiatives that promote closer cooperation between Barents Euro-Arctic Council and other relevant regional structures, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Activities:

- **Consider participation in the meetings of the other working groups or arrange meetings back-to-back when possible.**

## **Tentative calendar of events**

- **12 April 2012:** First meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation Presentation of the priorities of the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC) 2011-2013.  
Venue: Oslo/Norway
- **7 September 2012:** Participation at seminar on rights of indigenous peoples and development of economic resources, including minerals, in the Barents region.  
Venue: Tromsø
- **Fall 2012 (date to be confirmed):** Second meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation. Discussion on the Northern Sea Route.  
Venue: Kirkenes
- **Winter/spring 2013 (date to be confirmed):** Third meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation.  
Venue: Narvik

- **Winter/spring 2013 (date to be confirmed):** Conference on economic cooperation and the opportunities for cross border cooperation in the mineral sector.  
Venue: Narvik
  
- **Fall 2013 (date to be confirmed):** Fourth meeting of the Working Group on Economic Cooperation.  
Venue: Tromsø
  
- **Fall 2013 (date to be confirmed):** Seminar on marine bioprospecting.  
Venue: Tromsø

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