



**REPORT TO THE BARENTS ENVIRONMENT
MINISTERS' MEETING IN KIRKENES AND
MURMANSK
20-22 AUGUST 2001**

From the Barents Senior Environmental Officials / Working Group on Environment

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Barents Senior Environmental Officials (SEO)/Working Group on Environment was established in 1999 with the purpose of developing the environmental work under the Barents Euro Arctic Council. The Working Group continues the work of the Barents Environment Task Force from 1994 to 1999. In Umeå in 1999 the Task Force completed its work and delivered a comprehensive report to the Ministers.

The SEO comprises representatives from the following parties; Russia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland and the European Union. In the period 1999-2001, the SEO has been chaired by Norway. Five meetings have been held under the Norwegian Chairmanship i.a. at the Svanhovd Environmental Centre in Pasvik, in Oslo, Stokmarknes and Karasjok. The Observer Countries (the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Japan, Italy, United Kingdom, Canada and the U.S.) have participated at three of these meetings. The following issues have been given focus; Cleaner Production, Climate Change and Energy, Biodiversity, Environmental Education, Local agenda 21 and municipality-to-municipality co-operation, issues related to protection of the coastal area of the Barents Sea and issues of indigenous peoples. A separate seminar has been held on Cleaner Production in Oslo, a LA 21 network meeting in Uмба/Kandalaksha and a mini-seminar was arranged in Karasjok at the Sami Parliament on issues of the indigenous people. A separate seminar for indigenous people was arranged in relation to the Barents Ministerial Meeting in Kirkenes and Murmansk in August 2001.

In the first meeting at Svanhovd Environmental Centre, the SEOs decided upon issues to focus in the period of Norwegian chairmanship and on an Action Programme for the period 1999-2001 (attached). The Barents SEOs has made efforts to integrate and co-ordinate activities of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council with other international and regional fora; in particular the Barents Regional Council, the Arctic Council, the Baltic Sea Region Co-operation, the Nordic Council (including NEFCO and NIB), the European Union (the Northern Dimension, the TACIS and INTERREG programmes) and with bilateral activities. As far as the Northern Dimension is concerned, the Barents SEOs agreed on a document on the Contribution to the EU's Action Plan for the Northern Dimension with External and Cross-Border Policies 2000-2003 (attached).

1.1 The environmental work under the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)

The Ministers of Environment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council approved a plan of action for environmental protection and sustainable development in the Barents region at a meeting in Bodø in 1994. This plan focused on five areas: prevention of radioactive pollution, environmental protection management, reduction of industrial pollution, protection of biological diversity and regional environmental collaboration. A Task Force was established to get a better overview over ongoing projects in the region and to encourage the development of projects within the five areas. Since the first meeting in Bodø, the co-operation has been further developed at the ministerial meeting in Rovaniemi 1995 and in St. Petersburg in 1997 where issues like sustainable development in forestry and environmental investments were introduced.

At the meeting of Environmental Ministers in Sweden in 1999, the Umeå Declaration was agreed upon. The ministers called for further development of the above issues, and underlined the importance of more favourable conditions for foreign investments and to seek co-operation and integration with the environmental and economic aspects of the Northern Dimension of the European Union. In addition, the strengthening of environmental co-operation in the Barents Region through the implementation of Local Agenda 21 was recommended. The importance of environmental issues related to pollution and human health, particularly of Indigenous Peoples of the Region, was underlined. The need for the securing role and rights for the public through improved information was finally stressed.

1.2 The Action Programme 1999-2001

The Ministerial Declaration from the Barents Council meeting in Umeå and the related Task Force Report have formed the basis for environmental co-operation initiatives during Norway's chairmanship in the period 1999-2001. Sustainable development is stated as the principal objective of the Environmental Action Programme. Priority has been given to:

- Capacity building on Cleaner Production in business, industries and utilities and implementation of projects in co-operation with the Cleaner Production Centres in the region, technical universities, financial institutions and local authorities. There have also been co-operation on reduction of barriers to trade and financing as well as harmonisation of legal and administrative practices in relation to such projects.
- Integration of environmental concerns through cross-sector co-operation. Special emphasis has been put on co-operation with the Working Group on Energy and the potential for co-operation on climate change and energy in Northwest Russia.
- Municipality-to municipality co-operation and Local Agenda 21 based on environmental commitment and projects at local and regional level involving NGOs, schools, local authorities, industries, indigenous peoples and youth.
- Improvement in the conditions for the work of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and to strengthen the participation of the Indigenous Peoples, through meetings and a separate seminars.
- Improvement of information and communication on environmental challenges in the Barents Region and co-operation with NGOs
- Development of human resources and institutions by strengthening professional qualifications and competence in environmental management in governmental agencies in Murmansk.

Under the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Working Group on Environment, it was decided not to include matters related to nuclear safety and radioactive waste among the activities of the Action Programme since these issues are dealt with in the broader Barents Council context through the MNEPR-negotiations and under the auspices of IAEA.

2 REDUCTION OF POLLUTION FROM INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITIES

2.1 Cleaner Production

Cleaner Production has been a prioritised instrument for promoting Economic and Environmental Efficiency (Eco-efficiency) in Russian industry. Since 1996 more than 1100 engineers in the Russian part of the Barents Region have acquired the know-how of how to make their activities and production processes more environmentally friendly. Measures have been implemented at 500 different sites. This means that all larger industries have been involved in this programme. Even though these cleaner production investments are profitable,

too few enterprises have so far been able to implement them. NEFCO's revolving facility for cleaner production has been an important financial instrument for low cost projects with short pay back time, but has not been sufficient to achieve significant progress in implementation of projects.

The Barents Region's Workshop on Cleaner Production and Eco-Efficiency was held in Oslo, 5 December 2000. It was organised by the Ministry of Environment in co-operation with the Norwegian – Russian Cleaner Production Centre and the Norwegian Society of Chartered Engineers. In the workshop, experts both from the Barents Region and the Baltic Sea Region came together, shared the experiences of success stories of Russia, Poland and Lithuania and discussed the possibilities for strengthening the co-operation, particularly in the Barents Region. In the conclusions of the workshop the need for strengthening of financial mechanisms and development of environmental legislation, to develop a *demand* for the Cleaner Production strategy at enterprise level, is underlined. Furthermore, the workshop pointed to the need to clarify the division of responsibilities among authorities, as well as between the central, regional and local level to reduce the barriers for project implementation.

The workshop also recommended that environmental authorities at the regional and central levels must be stimulated to use the Cleaner Production Programme as part of their pollution control activities, when designing emission permits, regulations and guidelines. It was also pointed out that Cleaner Production activities should be integrated in Environmental Management Systems (e.g. ISO 14 000) and to develop case studies on how to make waste minimisation and environmental management profitable for the industry.

In addition, the workshop concluded that different stakeholders such as authorities, industry associations, indigenous peoples and NGOs should be involved in the process of promoting Cleaner Production. Finally, the workshop recommended to co-ordinate Cleaner Production activities both between educational and environmental authorities, between different international co-operation projects and, not at least, to develop a network between Technical Universities in NW Russia and the Nordic countries.

2.2 Investment projects

On the assignment of the Nordic Council of Ministers, NEFCO in 1995 together with AMAP, prepared the report "Environmentally sound investment projects in the Russian part of the Barents Region. A number of projects (22) were singled out for priority action, both non-nuclear(17) and nuclear safety(5) projects. Only a few of these selected "hot-spot" projects have been implemented mainly due to lack of capital. However, several energy efficiency projects have been carried out in co-operation with NEFCO, and a growing number of cleaner production investments are being implemented as described in 2.1. Attempts are being made to identify and develop climate change projects suitable for Joint Implementation between Russia and the Nordic countries.

A major step forward is the forthcoming rehabilitation project at the Pechenga Nickel Mining and Smelting Combine in Murmansk Oblast. After many years of preparation the project is now about to commence with external financing from NIB, Norway and Sweden. The implementation of the modernisation project is scheduled to start in 2001. The total emissions of sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and dust containing heavy metals will be reduced by approximately 90 % compared to the current emissions. The project, including the testing period of approximately two years, is scheduled to be finished in 2006/2007. This reduction of emissions will be of great importance for health and environment in the border areas, as well as to the health and security of the workers.

According to an analysis of the Barents Working Group on Economy the Russian part of the Barents Region has attracted only 2 % of total foreign investments made in Russia during 1995-1999. Limited credit-worthiness and legal restrictions have constrained the possibilities to use borrowed funds. The capacity for utilising grants or soft loans of donors has often been constrained by difficulties related to mobilising local funds for partial financing of the projects and unfavourable legal framework in the form of custom fees, taxes and liability issues.

In The Northern Dimension Action Plan the European Commission emphasised that IFIs ("The International Financial Institutions, in particular the EIB, the EBRD, the World Bank Group and the NIB/NEFCO), where appropriate, and according to their respective mandate, might play a significant role with regard to facilitating investment in the region.

The IFIs have responded in a favourable way by taking an initiative to establish a Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership, (NDEP). This framework for co-operation, which was endorsed by the EU Summit in Göteborg in June, 2001, is intended to encourage all interested IFIs to co-operate in the development and co-financing of projects, as part of the NDEP. As one way to mobilise additional grant resources, the NDEP initiative includes a proposal to set up a new donor financed fund to be managed by EBRD. These developments by the EU are promising and might contribute to financing of additional projects in the Russian part of the Barents Region.

3 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

A programme for education of environmental administrators from Northwest Russia was established in 1999 by Swedish EPA (SEPA) and provides training courses for selected young environmental administrators from different regions in Northwest Russia. One aim of the project is to give the participants knowledge and understanding of modern environmental policy and environmental protection in Sweden and Western Europe, and to prepare for a two-year training project as a continuation of the first training courses (2001-2003). During the last years a network between Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian programmes of environmental management assistance in Russia has been build up.

The Swedish Kola River Environmental Programme (KREP) is an illustrative case of the challenges confronting projects of capacity building and environmental management in the Russian Federation. KREP, which main objective is to establish modern principles for water protection and management within the Kola River catchment area, has been going on since 1997. Environmental monitoring, environmental information, establishment of a water protection/management association, and environmental measures has been developed as a result of the programme. KREP will be phased out during 2001. According to the Committee of Natural Resources in Murmansk, one of the present main hot spots in the catchment area is the outlet from the Chicken Farm, which infects drinking water of 500.000 inhabitants. Rehabilitation of the chicken farm has been supported by several of the Barents countries, but more investments are needed.

The Environmental Management Programme for the Murmansk region (EMP Murmansk) which started in the autumn 1997, has contributed to strengthening of the environmental management in the Murmansk region and implementation of an information technology system. The programme has received funding from Sweden and Norway in addition to project-based funding from external sources.

During the period 1999-2001, Finland has contributed with projects developed mainly in Karelia, but also in Murmansk and Archangels. There is an extended co-operation between

Kainuu and North Karelia Regional Environmental Centres and the Republic of Karelia. Pollution control projects have been one of the main tasks. Projects on development and evaluation of water service enterprises, security of a wastewater treatment plant, environmental monitoring, environmental information and education, nature protection and eco-tourism have been implemented.

The Lapland Regional Environmental Centre (TRC) has over the last ten years been involved in quality control training for environmental laboratories on the Kola Peninsula. In addition, the Technical Research Centre of Finland has been engaged on emission measurements for many years. As a result of these projects the technical and qualitative know-how of the laboratories on Kola and the reliability of the measurement results have increased. In the future, the focus of the TRC will be in waste management (waste incineration plant) in Murmansk city. In addition, North Ostrobothnia Regional Environmental Centre has recently launched a new Kola Water Quality Project focusing on identification of the sources of pollution, development of monitoring and measurement methods and purification methods.

The above mentioned examples serves as illustrations of the work to strengthen environmental management both at the regional and local levels in Northwest-Russia.

3 Protection of natural Habitats

Co-operation on habitat conservation and biodiversity protection issues in Pasvik has been going on between Finland, Russia and Norway since 1988. The co-operation with regard to this nature reserve has been successful and has stimulated activities in the neighbouring reserves, like mapping and monitoring of flora and fauna. Summer schools and courses for children and youth are also being arranged in the nature reserves, and local environmental education materials for the schools in this region is being developed in relation to the project. The possibilities of linking eco-tourism to the protected areas have been evaluated in co-operation with the environmental authorities and regional nature parks in Murmansk and Archangels.

In 1998, Norway, Sweden and Finland took the initiative to co-operate on a broader multilateral basis and established the International Contact Forum for Habitat Conservation in the Barents Region. Support has been provided to several international expert expeditions to new areas proposed for habitat conservation, new national parks and reserves. This Barents Forum will also be a tool to support the implementation of the Arctic Council program Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) and the EU's program Emerald Network in Northwest Russia. Co-operation continues on development of nature conservation areas, including support to establishment and management of protected areas. In the future, an essential part of this will be the analysis of representativeness and gaps in the network of protected areas in Northwest Russia. The three Scandinavian countries have together with Russia recently initiated a project which intend to make the data of the "Nature Chronicle of the Northwest Russian Nature Parks" accessible. This comprehensive collection of data from long time series of monitoring can be extremely valuable for international environmental monitoring and for the evaluation and prediction of climate change. In the future, projects such as sustainable use of biological resources in the Taiga zone, as well as capacity building programs on nature conservation for specialists in the regional and local administration will be carried out.

4 DEVELOPMENT AT THE SOLOVETSKY ARCHIPELAGO

Cultural Heritage Protection has been put on the agenda in the last years and cultural heritage at the Solovetsky Archipelago has been a major issue. The objective has been to develop the

Solovetsky community in a Local Agenda 21 perspective, including nature conservation and protection of cultural heritage, reduction of pollution and development of sustainable ecological tourism.

A comparative study of the management systems related to landscape protection of the mountain mining city of Røros in Norway and the Solovetsky Archipelago has been published. Both these places are on UNESCO's World Heritage List. An evaluation of Solovki as a combined cultural heritage and nature conservation site has also been carried through by an international expert group.

In 1999 the Barents Secretariat and the provincial administration of Troms County worked out a plan of measures and implemented a number of projects, which are important for social and cultural development at Solovki. These projects includes improvements in the working conditions of the school, the kindergarden, the hospital and the music school as well as restoration of the botanic garden and preservation of the cultural heritage.

The restoration works in the monastery at Solovki are, at present, proceeding very well under the new director of the Museum. These works are funded by the Russian federal authorities.

5 PREVENTION OF RADIOACTIVE POLLUTION AND PREPAREDNESS AGAINST NUCLEAR ACCIDENTS

Nuclear safety has been a prioritised area for the international collaboration in the Barents Region since the beginning. The practical work has been organised as bilateral and multilateral projects involving the competent ministries, as well as a number of agencies, companies and institutions of the Russian Federation and Western donor countries. A number of bilateral agreements between the Russian Federation and Western donor countries constitute the formal and legal framework for co-operation. In 1995, the Contact Expert Group (CEG) was established under the auspices of the IAEA to assist the countries involved in international radioactive waste projects in the Russian Federation in co-ordinating their efforts.

Legal problems has been a major obstacle since the very beginning of project collaboration between Western donors and the Russian Federation, and existing bilateral agreements have not proved adequate as a legal framework for multilateral projects. As chairman of the Barents Council, Norway therefore in 1999 took the initiative to establish a multilateral legal framework for project assistance to Russia in the field of radioactive waste management and related issues ("Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme in the Russian Federation" – MNEPR). Negotiations between the Russian Federation and potential Western donor countries started in 1999. The negotiations has been led by Norway, and include donors such as the US, UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the EU-Commission. Important issues related to tax exemption, access to sites and the accountability and status of personnel have recently been solved. The question of nuclear liability and some aspects of taxation are important issues still to be solved.

6 DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL AGENDA 21 IN THE REGION

The 4th Barents Council Meeting of Environmental Ministers in Umeå in June 1999 supported the idea of the former Regional Committee on Environment to establish a regional Barents Local Agenda 21 Network to provide a framework for participatory Local Agenda 21 processes within the local authorities and communities in the Barents Region. Emphasis has

been given to municipality-to-municipality co-operation, environmental education of children and youth, indigenous peoples, small-scale industrial projects, and cultural heritage.

6.1 Model areas for municipality-to-municipality co-operation:

The work is built on the established co-operation between twin municipalities in the Region and the co-operation is supposed to provide benefits for the environment and the local population. The Barents Local Agenda 21 Network was established at a meeting in Saariselka in Lapland late autumn in 1999 where nineteen twin-municipalities were represented, along with regional environment authorities and NGO's. Concrete projects were proposed on municipal engineering (drinking water supply, sewage-plants, treatment of waste), education of children and youth, sustainable tourism, biodiversity, exchange of experience and energy efficiency. The second meeting of the Barents Local Agenda 21 Network was held in Uмба/Kandalaksha 4-8 September 2000. Twenty-two municipalities participated as well as representatives of regional and national environmental authorities, Indigenous Peoples, and NGOs. The Russian representatives emphasised the importance for their municipalities of having this arena as a forum for discussion of environmental views of mutual concern.

6.2 Education/children and youth co-operation

As the concepts of Local Agenda 21 and sustainable development are relatively new, the objective has been to introduce these new ways of thinking into practical life through education. This has been done to an extensive degree in the Barents Region. The Svanhovd Environment Centre has organised projects aimed at increasing the environmental awareness and commitment of schoolchildren and youth. These have included for instance e.g. regional camps for children and youth in the Pasvik nature reserve, camps for School children from Sør-Varanger and Pechenga municipalities, annual youth camps with participants from North-Norway and Pechenga. In addition Norwegian and Russian counties have been involved in environmental education of children and youth. An important instrument in this respect has been the theatre performance "Clean Up" involving children and youth at the local level as performers and presenting culture to the local population.

Lapland Regional Environmental Centre is leading a three-lateral co-operation project, the aim of which is to collect and produce education material for schools on state of the environment in Lapland, Finnmark and Murmansk areas. The material is planned to be published in 2002.

In addition, Sweden has over the last six years financed an Environmental Bus providing information to the local population in the region. During this period, approximately 4000 school children have been given a basic knowledge on the environmental situation in the region.

6.3 Indigenous peoples

Indigenous peoples' co-operation has been strengthened between indigenous peoples in the Barents Region through development of a Regional Action Program for indigenous peoples for the period 2000 – 2003. The Sami Parliament in Norway has adopted a working program on Local Agenda 21. The successful co-operation between Karasjok and Lovozero municipalities on improvements of water supply and quality and student exchange is a good illustration of the potential for cooperation.

A study of the East Sami Culture on both sides of the Russian-Norwegian border has been undertaken. This study has also involved the East-Sami population of Finland, that originally inhabited areas that today are in Russia. This project included archive studies, interviews with informants, field studies and archaeological excavations. It has been important to involve

young people in the work, with great emphasis on the cultural vitalisation of this endangered culture. The results will be evaluated at a summing up conference scheduled to take place in Apatity in September 2001.

A mini-seminar on Indigenous Peoples issues was arranged in Karasjok 19 June 2001 for Members and Observer Countries. The assistant deputy minister of the Norwegian Ministry of Environment hosted the meeting. The Sami President and Vice-president, the Major of Karasjok, the Co-ordinator of the Indigenous Peoples' Working Group and the Sami coordinator of the Barents Secretariat took part in the arrangement which had a focus on the concerns of the indigenous peoples. It was pointed out the need to fulfil the objectives of Chapter 26 of Agenda 21 regarding the role of the indigenous peoples in the Barents region.

6.3 Environmental capacity building of Russian NGOs

Several non-governmental organisations are active in the Russian part the Barents region with an aim to develop and strengthen sister-organisations on Kola Peninsula, in Karelia and in St. Petersburg. A network of organisations and environmental centres has been established and has become more active, more visible and strengthened their credibility in the society.

Norwegian Society for Conservation of Nature (NSCN) runs projects on Local Agenda 21 (LA21) on environmental education and on energy on Kola and in Karelia. NSCN also runs the international school program on energy saving SPARE, where about 500 schools from Northwest Russia have participated. The Russian Ministry of Education has adopted SPARE to develop an all-Russian program on energy efficiency in the environmental education, including 62 000 schools. Awareness raising on energy efficiency and environmental issues might contribute to sustainable development in a long-run perspective. Demonstration projects will also be developed in 8-10 school buildings in the Barents Region in co-operation with Norwegian Energy Efficiency Group. The project will make it possible to implement a package of simple energy efficiency measures and serve as demonstration projects which have a large replication potential in Northwest Russia. The Norwegian Government has supported the programme financially.

7 INTEGRATING THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION IN SECTOR POLICIES

7.1 Sustainable use of forests

The forest sector is an important economic field in the Barents region. Most of the forests in Nordic countries and Northwest Russia are part of the boreal coniferous forest zone, which economically comprises one of the most important part of the global forest resources. In 1999, The Forest Sector Initiative was formulated by the Barents Council to improve rural development in the Boreal forest region covering the forested areas of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Northwest Russia.

As a following up of this initiative, and the expert seminar organised by a working group in Petrozavodsk in October 1999, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in March 2000 in Oulu welcomed the decision to create a Forest Sector Task Force. One of the major goals was to prepare a Northern Dimension Forest Sector Programme (NDFSP). The NDFSP was presented to the Barents Euro-Arctic Council's Eight Session in Murmansk in March 2001, and to the Second Foreign Ministers' Conference on the Northern Dimension in Luxemburg in April 2001. The NDFSP presents a proposed agenda for combined efforts of a range of institutions in countries of Northern Europe. The goal of the proposed NDFSP is to identify

and achieve common targets for sustainable forestry and livelihoods through collaboration amongst Northern Dimension countries.

7.2 Climate change and energy efficiency projects

The energy systems in Northwest Russia have a low energy-efficiency degree and are to a large extent based on coal and heavy fuel oil in addition to nuclear power. Investments are needed to modernise energy infrastructure and utilise energy resources more efficiently in order to reduce local and regional air pollution, as well as emissions of greenhouse gases.

Under the Norwegian Chairmanship initiatives have been taken in the climate change and energy field. Closer co-operation has been developed with the Barents Working Group on Energy.

A special focus has been given to the potential for fuel switching from fossil fuels to renewable resources and energy efficiency measures. The Working Group on Environment has supported an initiative to promote utilisation of local renewable energy resources that can contribute to win-win effects with regard to local, regional and global air pollution. A Bioenergy Programme in Northwest Russia is under development to co-ordinate actors in the Barents region. Steps have been made to co-ordinate with similar activities under the Nordic Council and in the Baltic Sea Region. On the Russian side an important step has been made by Archangels Oblast in proposing to establish a Pilot Region for Joint Implementation in Arkhangels. The proposal has been through a hearing in the Russian State Duma and has received positive support.

A seminar on Bioenergy and Joint Implementation is planned in co-operation with the Working Group on Energy in the autumn of 2001. Enhanced co-operation in the climate change and energy field might be of importance for the follow-up of the Kyoto commitments.

7.3 Environment and health

A closer co-operation between the environment and health sector has been urged, especially as to drinking water/sanitation and waste management.

North-Karelia and North-Savo Regional Environmental Centres are involved in many development projects in the fields of drinking water supply and waste water management in Russian Karelia.

The municipality of Karasjok has since 1989 had a twinning agreement with the municipality of Lovozero, which first comprised the cultural sector and later included the health sector, as mentioned under 6.3. The project of reconstructing the drinking water reservoir of Lovozero is part of the Local Agenda 21 in the Barents Region and gives positive health effects for the local population. An official opening of the installation is planned to take place by the end of September 2001.

The municipalities of Karasjok and Lovozero and the Olenogorsk Vodokanal have concluded a twinning agreement on capacity building and water management to optimise this project with a time perspective of two years.

Another example is the work related to rehabilitation of the Murmansk poultry farm will also have significant effects for the drinking water quality when it is fully implemented.

8 INFORMATION

During the Norwegian chairmanship, a Barents home page on environment in the Barents region has been developed. In order to make the Barents co-operation more widely known to the public journalists, experts and media people took part in journey with the old Pomor vessel "Pauline" from Trondheim 30 of June ending in Kirkenes by mid July. Unfortunately, "Pauline" was not given permission to embark White Sea harbours. However, the planned seminars and arrangements were carried through in Russian towns and villages and with an overwhelming interest. Several hundred people have taken part in seminars on nature conservation, protection of cultural heritage, pollution issues and Local Agenda 21 and the local involvement and activities in several of the municipalities are reported to be high.