

# Report from the Meeting of the Four Regional Councils of the North

2016

## Arctic Council Secretariat

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Meeting Report

# Meeting of the Four Regional Councils of the North

Arctic Council, Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Council of the Baltic Sea States, and Nordic Council of Ministers

Wednesday, November 11, 2015, Reykjavik, Iceland

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Reykjavík

## 1. Welcoming Remarks

The meeting of the Four Regional Councils of the North took place in Reykjavik, Iceland on November 11, 2015. All four councils were represented. The Arctic Council Secretariat hosted the meeting. Magnús Jóhannesson, Director, Arctic Council Secretariat welcomed delegates, noting that meetings of the Four Regional Councils of the North, the Arctic Council (AC), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), have been taking place regularly at least since 2007.

## 2. Opening Remarks

Ambassador David Balton, Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials of the Arctic Council, provided opening remarks.

## 3. Updates from the Four Councils

### **Arctic Council (AC)**

- Presented by Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials, Ambassador David Balton
- The AC is being currently chaired by the United States for the period 2015-2017. The Chairmanship will culminate in a Ministerial meeting in the spring of 2017.
- The US Chairmanship priorities include
  - Adapting to climate change
  - Arctic Ocean Stewardship
  - Improving economic and living conditions for the people of the North
- In addition to the six standing working groups of the AC, three additional Task Forces have been created to deal with single issues of limited duration:
  - Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation - which may result in an Arctic Regional Seas program
  - Task Force on Telecommunications Infrastructure in the Arctic
  - Task Force on Scientific Cooperation – may result in a binding agreement
- Also established an Expert Group on Black Carbon and Methane that will meet in early 2016. So far six of the eight Arctic States have submitted emissions inventories, along with a number of Arctic Council Observer states.
- An overview of all ongoing projects in the Arctic Council was provided by the Arctic Council Tracking Tool

### **Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)**

- Presented by the Chair of the Committee of Senior Officials, Mr. Sergey Petrovich
- The BEAC is currently chaired by the Russian Federation
- Priorities include:
  - *Transport and Logistics* - Focus on new highways to boost business opportunities and improve access to remote communities. Developing plans for commercial use of the Northern Sea Route. Concrete tasks include adopting a joint Barents transport plan which include rail, road, and sea traffic, and also improve air links within the north.

- *Environmental Protection and Climate Change* - Focus on economic development with respect for the environment. Elimination of Barents Hot Spots, 6 of 42 hotspots have been eliminated. Interested in mitigating the impacts of climate change on traditional ways of life, which includes protected areas projects.
- *Culture* and tourism – Using culture as a tool to promote people to people contacts. Concrete projects include the Barents Culture Scholarship program and the extension of the Hutigruten from northern Norway to Murmansk, Arkhangelsk and Solovetsky Islands (Solovki).
- At the intergovernmental level, BEAC is represented by Foreign Ministers, in addition local cooperation among 13 regions exists to develop relevant projects.
- Three other Ministerial meetings are being planned:
  - November 24-25, 2015, Environment Ministers
  - June 2016 – Transport Ministers
  - Summer 2016 – Ministers of Culture

### **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)**

- Presented by Presented by the Chair of the Committee of Senior Officials, Ambassador Michael Czyz
- Poland is currently Chairing the CBSS and have three areas of focus:
  - Sustainable Development that respects the environment while balancing the needs of communities. The recent UN Sustainable Development Goals call on regional actions and help to guide the CBSS approach.
  - Culture as a driving force for social and economic development, and civil protection
  - Civil protection
- The current political conditions in the region pose a challenge to CBSS cooperation at the moment, as a result no Ministerial meeting was held in June 2015 to mark the beginning of the Polish Chairmanship. However, cooperation continues in areas such as sustainable development to ensure that the region is prosperous, safe and secure.
- CBSS would like to see more structured cooperation between the Four Regional Councils to monitor synergies and cohesion. Creation of a “Wise Men Group” has been proposed with the goal to find added value stemming from enhanced synergy of activities between the Councils, and what and where they could do better together.
- CBSS would like to see the EU Northern Dimension Partnership invited to future meetings of the Four Regional Councils of the North, as they are a key player in the region.

### **Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM)**

- Presented by Jens Nytoft Rasmussen, Senior Adviser
- NCM is the oldest of the Four Regional Councils, created at the parliamentary level. Ministerial meetings include foreign policy and defense issues.
- The NCM is currently being Chaired by Finland with a current focus on:
  - Migration
  - Water, Nature and People
  - Ensuring Nordic cooperation with the EU – Important for Nordic countries to coordinate positions when possible to leverage influence at the EU level.
  - International Cooperation – Cooperation to the East, in particular in Russia, and the Arctic are key goals. Have funds to support projects that are large and cross-cutting in nature and location.

## **4. Relationships with Observers**

AC Chair David Balton led the discussion on Observer engagement, pointing out that the Arctic Council has 32 Observers, plus the EU as an Ad Hoc Observer. The challenge facing the AC is how to meaningfully

engage all the current Observers, and deciding on the applications of 16 pending Observer applications. At the last SAO meeting in Anchorage, a special session was held with Observers to discuss how to involve Observers in the cross-cutting work of the AC. Issues that are global in nature, like climate change, short lived climate pollutants, science cooperation and migratory species are all areas where cooperation is welcome and necessary. Over the coming years, the AC review the participation of existing Observers. Details of the nature of this process are being worked out.

During the discussion it was noted that Observer engagement varies across the four councils. BEAC has nine observer states, but they are not engaged in the day to day work of the Arctic Council, and only attend Ministerial meeting for information purposes. BEAC has no written rules of procedure to guide relations with observers.

CBSS observers include only states. Relations are governed by guidelines that include tools for information dissemination. Observer should improve the capacity of the CBSS and help to achieve long term priorities. The CBSS CSO meet annually with observers, with the purpose of determining where observers can meaningfully engage in the project work of the CBSS. This is a challenge, like that seen by the AC. Overall however, the relationship with observers is not overly formal or seen as a problem within the CBSS.

The Nordic Council of Ministers does not have observers and have no intention expanding membership to include outside partners.

## 5. Advancing Sustainable Development – Approaches of the Four Councils

Krista Kampus, from the CBSS, led the discussion on sustainable development, focusing on the recently adopted UN Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 17 notes the importance of partnerships in achieving the goals, highlighting the need for effective regional cooperation. This is a great opportunity for the four regional councils to work together to create joint reporting and monitoring at a macro-regional level. To kick start this process two options were tabled:

- 1) Create a joint four councils SD forum to “fast track” implementation of 2030 Agenda.
- 2) Hold joint WG meeting on climate change/SD issues in the Baltic-Arctic region, focusing on cross-cutting issues.

During discussion there was general agreement that SD offers an opportunity to work more closely together, as economic development with respect for the environment is a key tenant for all the four councils. This includes respecting traditional knowledge and the needs of local communities who inhabit the northern regions.

## 6. Tracking synergies across the Four Councils

Tomas Hallberg, Head of the International Barents Secretariat (BEAC), presented a recent report of the BEAC Ad Hoc Group on Financial Mechanism Study “*Financing of Barents Cooperation*” and also provided an update on the Bodø Process. Major conclusions from the financial mechanisms included:

- EU Northern Dimension programs are thematically focused and are generally long term projects. Economic development projects are given priority over areas such as culture and youth. EU programs and financing mechanisms are important but time consuming to access. It is also difficult to access funds to cover everyday costs of the project.
- The need for capacity building and information dissemination of the existing financial sources for Barents Cooperation should be improved among interested stakeholders.
- Exploring options for adjusting existing funding mechanisms should be examined to improve the availability of funding for small-scale projects, seed money and technical assistance project preparation.
- Based on the study, at this stage, there is no common interest to establish a new financial mechanism for the Barents Region.

The Bodø Process continues to move forward, and the latest report can be found at <http://www.arcticconnections.eu/files/2014/04/PROPOSAL-FOR-A-CROSS-ARCTIC-REGIONAL-COLLABORATION-MECHANISM2.pdf>

During the discussion both the CBSS and AC agreed with the recommendations from the report. Accessing and leveraging funds for projects is a common theme shared by BEAC, CBSS and the AC.

On the topic of tracking synergies between the four councils a lively discussion took place, with all agreeing that pinpointing common work threads and projects would be beneficial to all the councils. Meeting once a year is helpful at the Secretariat level. More communication at the working group level should be examined to reduce duplication of efforts on cross-cutting issues. To date, this kind of information sharing has been ad hoc, but useful when linkages are made. One concrete suggestion made by BEAC was to develop an internship whereby the intern would work at all four councils over the course of one year, and then produce a final report tracking synergies and suggesting some ways to reduce overlap and possible duplication of efforts. BEAC agreed to prepare a proposal for consideration by the four councils on this idea.

The Russian Chairmanship of the BEAC reminded of its proposal, made at the XV BEAC Ministerial meeting (Oulu, Finland, 14-15 October 2015), to think about the resumption of holding Meetings of the Four Regional Councils of the North and the Northern Dimension Partnerships at the level of the Deputy Foreign Ministers. The first such meeting was held on the Russian initiative in August 2009 in Saint Petersburg, the second one – in January 2012 in Oslo. Russia would be ready to host next such meeting in spring-summer 2016 within the framework of the Russian Chairmanship of the BEAC.

## 7. Engagement of Youth in the work of the Four Councils

The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK) provided a number of presentations highlighting their excellent work in the Nordic region. You can watch a number of videos on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kt-NBTcXnHg>

During the discussion it was highlighted that cooperation on youth activities in the northern region is important and while not difficult, is dependent on information sharing across the four councils. As socio-economic, cultural, and languages differ across the northern regions so do the opportunities for learning from information exchange and face-to-face meetings among youth. CBSS noted BalticLab, supported by the Swedish Institute, which brings together young entrepreneurs for discussions on relevant topics. One suggestion was to organize a roundtable on how to better coordinate all the different youth activities in the northern region.

## 8. Preparation for the UNFCCC COP 21 in Paris, December 2015

The Nordic Ministers on Climate and Environment Declaration was submitted to the COP21, noting the importance of adaptation and mitigation. The NCM is hosting a number of side events lead by the five Nordic countries. All the CBSS member states will be attending COP21 and a joint session with the EU EPA will take place on December 2 on the topic of adaptation. The AC SAO Chair, on behalf of the Arctic States and other signatories, has forwarded a statement signed at the GLACIER Conference (August 2015). Iceland will sponsor a side event that will feature the work of the AC on black carbon and methane.

## 9. AOB and Next Meeting

It was agreed that representatives from the EU's Northern Dimension programs would be invited to future meetings as they have an important role to play on some of the cross cutting issues in the northern region.

The CBSS will host the next meeting of the Four Regional Councils of the North in 2016.

# Meeting of the Four Regional Councils of the North

Arctic Council, Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Council of the Baltic Sea States, and Nordic Council of Ministers

Wednesday November 11, 2015, Reykjavik, Iceland  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rauðarárstígur 25, 105 Reykjavík

*Final Draft Agenda (October 30, 2015)*

**Tuesday, November 10, 2015**

19:00 - Delegates Dinner at the restaurant Kol, Skólavörðustígur 40.

**Wednesday, November 11, 2015**

*The Meeting with start at 9:00 a.m.*

1. Welcoming Remarks – Magnús Jóhannesson, Director, Arctic Council Secretariat
2. Opening Remarks – David Balton, Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials of the Arctic Council
3. Updates from the Four Councils
  - Presentations should be limited to current work plan priorities. (7-10 minutes each)
    - Arctic Council – Ambassador David Balton
    - Barents Euro-Arctic Council – Ambassador Sergey Petrovich
    - Council of the Baltic Sea States – Ambassador Michal Czyz
    - Nordic Council of Ministers – Jens Nytoft Rasmussen
4. Relationships with Observers (Arctic Council Lead)
  - Ambassador David Balton will open the discussion on observer engagement.
  - Delegates will be invited to raise issues and strategies used to engage with Observers.
5. Advancing Sustainable Development – Approaches of the Four Councils (CBSS Lead)
  - Ambassador Michal Czyz will present Baltic 21, and kick off the discussion.
  - Delegates are invited to note approaches Sustainable Development and identify cross-cutting themes and areas of potential synergy.
6. Discussion of option to track synergies across the Four Councils. (BEAC Lead)
  - Tomas Hallberg will present the report of the BEAC Ad Hoc Group on Financial Mechanism Study “*Financing of Barents Cooperation*” and also provide an update on the Bodø Process.
  - Delegates will discuss possible options for increasing information exchange and tracking synergies between the Four Councils.
7. Engagement of Youth in the work of the Four Councils. (NCM Lead)
  - Jen Nytoft Rasmussen (or youth representative TBC) will lead the discussion by presenting some of the work going on with the Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK).
  - Each of the Councils will be invited to discuss approaches to youth participation.
8. Preparation for the UNFCCC COP 21 in Paris, December 2015
  - Roundtable discussion on plans for representation at the COP 21.

9. AOB and Next Meeting

10. End of Meeting

*[The meeting will end between 15:00 and 16:00]*