

Meeting of the Chairs of the Northern Regional Councils

September 14th, 2001 Holmenkollen/Norway

Coordination from Arctic Council's viewpoint / Peter Stenlund, Chairman of the SAOs

- The Arctic Council is the only circumpolar governmental forum, which makes it a tool in transatlantic co-operation. The European Union is a missing link, even if some contacts have been established.
- The structure of the Arctic Council, with all Arctic countries as Members, and the Arctic indigenous peoples participating in the work on an equal footing, enables the Council to represent this unique region with considerable legitimacy. Close contacts among the capitals and the Arctic sub-regions anchor the activities in Arctic communities.
- The Arctic Council is a unique international forum for co-operation between national governments and indigenous peoples - an arrangement which might serve as a model in other parts of the world. Here is a difference between AC and BEAC. The position of indigenous peoples is stronger in AC while the role of sub-regions is better defined in BEAC. Northern Forum as an observer may serve as a circumpolar sub-regional partner to the AC. This situation has resulted in a number of indigenous initiatives that are limited to the Barents region. BEAC seems now to be strengthening the role of the Saami people.
- The abundant flora of northern organisations contributes to stability in broad terms. It is a security and prosperity enhancing web. Most organisations and institutions have identified their specific role. But there is a risk of overlapping – especially if the same actors are expected to contribute to similar activities in several institutions.
- The Arctic Council should focus on region wide, circumpolar issues. The Arctic Council shall not engage itself in activities, that involve partners only from the Barents region – this is the niche of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and its regional committee. Barents cooperation may be conceived as a sub-contractor to region wide circumpolar strategies.
- Circumpolar cooperation started in the environmental sector – the AEPS adopted 10 years ago. Monitoring and assessment of environment became a brand of the AEPS and later on, of the AC. ACAP means action but mostly aimed at filling knowledge gaps related to the primary tasks of AMAP.
- RPA (Arctic) aims at project cooperation, most often with Russia within the Russian NPA Arctic. The ultimate goal is investments in hot spots in the Russian Arctic. Barents Environmental Cooperation (AMAP and NEFCO) has already years ago identified the same hot spots as comes to the Barents sub region. Here is an urgent

need for good exchange of information between PAME and BEAC Environment , Tacis , IFIs and other actors.

- The Arctic Council Ministerial in Barrow, Alaska, in October 2000 brought the AC into a new phase. The Ministerial agreed upon a strategic framework document on sustainable development – the Barrow Chapeau. With this foundation for further cooperation in place the economic, social and cultural aspects of sustainable development will come more into focus in the Arctic Council. Themes such as public health, telemedicine, distance learning, the future of children and youth, the role of women and sustainable infrastructure development are all linked to efforts aimed at enhancing quality of life and stemming migration from Arctic regions.
- This development makes good coordination with BEAC even more urgent. AC must be circumpolar – and BEAC remain within its own boundaries, which well could include also Komi.
- The presence of the same broad themes such as environment, health, infrastructure etc in the working programmes of several regional councils must not necessarily mean duplication. If coordination takes place it could be good synergies. In that sense some of the conclusions in the report “ Regional Organisations in the North” seems superficial.
- In the socio-economic sector the Finnish Chair of the AC has the ambition to coordinate well with the BEAC. According to the existing AC “rules of procedure” a new project or activity may be launch with as few as two participating countries. SDWG has already agreed to give priority to activities involving at least three countries. Arctic activities only among the Nordics should not be granted AC status.
- In some cases our intention is to provide originally Barents activities with a circumpolar extension. We are exploring such possibilities as regards youth cooperation.
- As regards transport and infrastructure there is a strong call for circumpolar activities, not least in Alaska and Canada. A circumpolar transport workshop is organised in Tornio this month back-to-back with a BEATA-meeting in Haparanda. Circumpolar cooperation seems to focus mainly on sea transports and aviation while BEATA puts emphasis on land transports. BEA has already a Working Group on the Northern Sea Route, which actually is an issue of circumpolar interest.
- NCM has been granted observer status in the AC and has already from the launch of Arctic environmental cooperation served as an important financial partner. NCM may take credits for having contributed to the success of for example AMAP. Good coordination is in place and the close cooperation with the AC will be politically confirmed in the new Arctic strategy of the NCM. This will eliminate any risks of duplication.
- As regards CBSS there are no overlaps with AC. As regards EU’s Northern Dimension the European Commission tends to consider CBSS as the prime interlocutor in the north. All ND partners are present in the CBSS. This regional body is not competent to speak on behalf of the circumpolar Arctic. The Commission seems to move in this direction.

Finally

BEAC's decision to pro-long its chair periods is very welcome. This means good synchronization with the AC. It also helps to create a good political momentum each time we convene in the Arctic at the Foreign Minister's level.