

Established in 1993, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), which comprises the Russian Federation, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the European Commission, is an inherent part of multilateral cooperation on the continent, representing the contribution of the states of our region to stronger international stability and security.

Interaction in the Barents region is taking place at both intergovernmental and regional levels and covers a broad range of issues in the field of economy, environmental protection, energy, transport, education, culture, public health, youth exchanges, prevention of emergencies, customs cooperation and assistance to the development of indigenous peoples.

Participation in regional cooperation in the North and in the Arctic is a major component of the Russian foreign policy. We consider such interaction as a useful and effective tool to foster stability, confidence and sustainable development in the North. Taking over the Chairmanship from Finland, the Russian Federation declares that it will maintain the course on deeper current mutually beneficial partnership and will work towards extending it over to new areas.

The priority of the Russian Chairmanship will be to ensure sustainable development in the Barents Region with emphasis on social and economic factors, linking it closely to the compliance with environmental requirements, and also to support for the indigenous peoples.

The agenda in the area of **public health** provides for the development of strategy and implementation of preventive measures aimed at promoting a healthy life-style, including prevention of alcohol, smoking and drug addiction; prevention of non-infectious diseases; ensuring a higher availability of medication; prevention and control of socially significant diseases (HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis). The organization of the Healthy Life-Style Conference, and a round table on improving health and social life conditions meet these objectives.

We are going to intensify our cooperation in the field of education and hold a joint conference with the BEAC countries and the European Commission on higher professional education. We are planning to develop academic and scientific mobility, particularly within the Northern Cross-Border University Project, involving higher educational institutions in the Russian part of the Barents region, we will assist in holding regular forums on education and scientific research on the basis of higher educational institutions in the Barents region.

The mutual studying of **national cultures** of the BEAC countries, supporting cultures of indigenous peoples, holding festivals of culture and films, folklore and music as well as exhibitions for these purposes are among important objectives. The action plan of the Working Group on Culture for 2008 - 2010 is being prepared.

To develop the **youth contacts**, we will hold a meeting of BEAC Ministers for Youth Policy, a youth conference, and meetings of the Working Group on Youth Policy. We will develop the Barents Youth Cooperation Program for 2007 - 2010. The Barents Regional Youth Council and the Barents Youth Cooperation Office in Murmansk will continue their work.

Special attention will be paid to the problems of the **Barents indigenous peoples** and their involvement (also through the appropriate working groups) in cooperation in the field of education, public health, traditional activities and economic activity in general, environmental protection, and infrastructure improvement. For these purposes we will use the resources of the Indigenous Peoples Office in Murmansk. We will continue implementing the Indigenous Peoples Action Plan for 2005 - 2008.

As to the **economy**, we intend to pay special attention to the trade liberalization, including elimination of administrative and technical barriers, support of small and medium enterprises, promotion of innovation technologies and establishment of information exchange networks, creation of the favorable investment climate, stimulation of direct inter-regional and cross-border links. Within the framework of the already traditional Barents Industrial Partnership Conference we will promote broader contacts between business and government. We will continue to cooperate with the other regional organizations, particularly with the Barents Business Advisory Group, in which the local chambers of commerce participate. In the area of **energy** we will focus on introducing the energy-saving technologies. We will promote the development of **forestry** based on modern technologies.

To ensure **environmental protection** in the Barents Region we shall further our efforts against man made pollution, inter alia through joint projects aimed at eliminating "environmental hot spots", numbering nearly 50 today; to support clean production and consumption programs and projects; to elaborate and implement measures focused on stabilizing the North and Arctic climate system and adapting the region's population and economies to the negative consequences of climate change; preserve and restore natural biodiversity and habitats of biological species; to develop a network of specially protected natural territories; to preserve natural and cultural heritage objects; to apply the ecosystem approach to water resources and offshore marine zones management; to preserve forests and control forest fires.

Transport cooperation which is essential for developing regional economy and trade will be focused on removing unjustified administrative and technical barriers to transportation service delivery; eliminating "bottlenecks" in the transport infrastructure of BEAC member countries; elaborating and implementing regional transport projects; and promoting public-private partnership to implement them. To attain these objectives a plan of cooperation for the next two years will be elaborated. All these issues will be discussed by the Steering Committee for the Barents Euro-Arctic Pan-European Transport Area (BEATA) during its regular sessions.

BEAC member countries' customs services will further improve and simplify customs procedures; remove customs barriers; coordinate this activity at cross-border checkpoints;

computerize customs processing system and establish electronic advance information exchange on goods being moved in the process of mutual trade; and develop logistics chains to enhance their efficiency. Operational interaction will be improved to prevent customs offences at cross-border checkpoints as well as customs territories of BEAC member states.

The Ad-hoc Joint Committee will continue to work out and consequently implement an agreement between the governments of Council's member states for **cooperation in emergency prevention and management**. We attach great importance to an oil spill response international exercise with the involvement of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Russian Federation and Russian oil company "LUKOIL" to be organized in the territory of the port of Varandei in the Yamalo-Nenetsky Autonomous District in 2008 and BEAC member countries exercises "Barents Rescue - 2009". Ministries of Emergencies' exercises and workshops will be organized in cross-border areas.

In addition to the BEAC Committee of Senior Officials, Russia will also **chair** the working groups on economic cooperation, culture, transport, trade barriers and youth policy, and lead the Barents Industrial Partnership.

Great responsibility rests with the Russian Federation as the presiding country for making operational, from January 2008, a new organizational structure - permanent **International Barents Secretariat**. With its establishment an effective technical support will be provided to the multilateral coordinated cooperation within the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council.

Constructive cooperation, aimed at the comprehensive growth of this part of our continent, will developed with the **Barents Regional Council** (BRC) and its 13 BEAC member countries' local administrative entities. Chairmanship in BRC will be taken over by Finland's Province of Oulu from Russia's Republic of Karelia.

The Fourth Parliamentary Barents Conference will promote further development of the parliamentary dimension.

We believe that one of the vital prerequisites of successful work of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council is further **strengthening of cooperation with other international and regional organizations and councils in the North**, primarily with Northern Dimension new policy arrangements, the Arctic Council, Council of the Baltic Sea States and Nordic Council of Ministers. We will be searching for the spheres to combine our efforts for increasing the practical efficiency of our cooperation.

We will focus on **enhancing the effectiveness of the whole architecture of multilateral cooperation in the North**, the division of labor among the regional councils both in substance and geography, synchronization and coordination of their activity on more rational use of the existing resources and avoidance of unnecessary duplication of efforts.

The Russian Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council relies on the support of all member states, the Barents Regional Council, local administrative entities and observers in the implementation of the BEAC Chairmanship Program for 2007-2009 in the common

interests of progressive development of international cooperation in the Barents Sea Region for the benefit of people living there.