
The Barents Cooperation. New regional approach to foreign policy in the High North.

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The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of the Cold War. Some said it was the end of History - «all ideology was dead». In the High North there were signs of a coming new era already in 1987 when Mikhail Gorbachev in his Murmansk speech encouraged more regional cooperation with the neighboring Nordic countries. At the same time, the climate along the Russian-Norwegian border changed in a positive way - travelling in Northwest Russia became easier in all aspects. Movements across the border increased dramatically.

The Soviet Union became history in December 1991, and only one year later the new Russia became an equal and strong partner in the new regional cooperation initiative launched in Kirkenes on 11th January 1993. The establishment of the Barents Region was partly a result of the regionalization trend evolving in Europe in the early 1990s under the European Commission presidency of Jaques Delors.

The Barents initiative

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region, which in terms of land territory is one of the biggest international region-building projects in Europe, was first of all established to meet the new security challenges following the breakup of the Soviet Union and the opening up of the borders between East and West.

The region today comprises of thirteen administrative entities in four countries; Russia, Norway, Finland and Sweden, covering a land area of 1 755 800 square kilometers, stretching from the Urals to the Norwegian Sea. About 5,9 million people inhabit the region. The structures of the cooperation include two political levels, the *Barents Council*, where ministers and government officials assemble, and the *Barents Regional Council*, where politicians and officials from the respective regions meet. The strong emphasis of political regional cooperation has made the Barents structures quite unique in European East-West cooperation with Russia.

Norway was the country, which was the driving force in the initiation of the Barents Cooperation. In this process also relations with the EU were of major importance. The official establishment of the cooperation came immediately after the establishment of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and in the heat of a Norwegian government campaign for EU membership in a 1994 referendum. In one way, therefore, the Barents Region initiative can be seen as a Norwegian contribution to the ongoing regionalization processes in Europe, as well as a move intended to sweeten EU membership to a skeptical population in the north of Norway.

Stretching over major parts of Northwest Russia and three Nordic countries, the region bridges areas, which for decades were heavily influenced by high Cold War tensions and deep social, economic and political cleavages. With the formal establishment of the Barents Cooperation, the involved countries signaled an important shift from hard security priorities to an alternative and diversified security approach, which included emphasis on regional political cooperation, cross-border human contacts and the formation of common regional identities.

In the High North there has been a long tradition for regional cooperation between the Nordic countries Finland, Sweden and Norway - partly within the frames of the North Calotte Cooperation. The developments in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev with his Glasnost and Perestroika opened a window for an extended regional cooperation, which included Russia.

There is no reason to undervalue the role of former minister of foreign affair Thorvald Stoltenberg, who took the political initiative to launch the Kirkenes declaration of January 11th 1993. However, the success of the Barents Cooperation also lays in a maturing process among local and regional individuals, which started several years before 1993. In Norway, the main people in this process were local and regional politicians, businessmen and representatives of NGOs in the three northernmost Norwegian counties. Their motives were either new business possibilities connected with trade and investment, or simply a desire to have more exchange and contact with the Russian neighbors.

This local knowledge and the genuine interest in cross-border cooperation, which had evolved before the formal establishment of the Barents Cooperation in 1993, was instrumental in securing a central role for regional-level cooperation in the Barents structures. East - West contacts and trade in the region had been impossible during the Cold War because of the frozen political thinking in Moscow and the Nordic capitals.

Unlike the Baltic Cooperation or Arctic Council, the Barents Cooperation developed as a bottom-up driven process. The result of that can be illustrated by the strong role of regional stakeholders in the cooperation. Thousands of multilateral and bilateral co-

operation projects have been developed between Norway, Russia, Finland and Sweden. The Norwegian Barents Secretariat has alone supported more than 3500 of them. The majority of these projects are in the so called «people-to-people» segment. With these projects, a significant «cooperation capital» has been accumulated, and that can today serve as a resource bank for the growing business cooperation.

The role of political multilateral cooperation between the regions should also not be underestimated. The fact that governors and politicians meet each other on a regular basis has an important security aspect. Regions do not go to war – that is the state's «privilege».

Practical approach

To what extent will Russia promote or prevent its regions' direct contact with foreign powers? The question is about as ancient as Russia itself. Moscow has always struggled to balance the federal authorities' need for control over the regions with the regions' need for freedom to develop. In a debate about contemporary federal developments in Russia, the question remains highly relevant. To what extent is Russia today willing to downplay «hard» security policies in favor of a «softer» security approach in border regions?

Russia has its apparent primary focus on geopolitical thinking, and the development of the country's border regions is to a significant extent determined by bigger geopolitical priorities. This is a challenge for Russian regional policies, which also applies to the Barents region-building project.

Over the last decade, the Kremlin has strengthening its power over the regions. However, the federal authorities have still expressed firm support to several regional cooperation initiatives with neighboring countries. That was evident also at the Barents Council (BEAC) meeting in Murmansk in October 2009. Then, Russian minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov highlighted his support to the Council, arguing that the Barents Cooperation gives «direct benefits for the people in the region».¹

The story of the BEAC is a success story. Over its years of existence, the Council has established itself firmly on the political map of Europe and gained a reputation as an organization that prefers, rather than loud declarative statements, concrete action for the benefit of the people living in the region.²

As a matter of fact, human aspects are in the forefront in the cooperation, he maintained:

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Barents cooperation over the years is respect, mutual trust and warm personal relations between people living in this northern region.³

Meanwhile, the new Russian Foreign Policy Concept describes the Barents Cooperation as «a practical cooperation of joint projects».⁴

It is worth noting that it is the *practical approach*, which is being highlighted from the Russian side. In his Barents Council speech in Murmansk, Minister Lavrov said that this approach to some extent even «helps soften the consequences of the finance crisis».

Russia also expresses firm support for a liberalization of visa regulations for people living in the border area.⁵ Not surprisingly, visa regulations between Russia and the Schengen zone are the main obstacle to extended cross-border movements. More flexible arrangements for East-West traveling would significantly facilitate contacts, cooperation and growth in the border areas. Despite certain progress, there is still a long way to go in this regard.

Barents – Russia – EU

Another aspect that might play a central role in the future development of the Barents Cooperation is the involvement of the European Union. In January 2009, the Commission launched its Arctic Communication, a paper meant to be the forerunner of a bigger EU Arctic Policy. The Barents Cooperation can play a key role in developing the EU Northern Dimension and also contribute positively in the ongoing negotiations for a successor EU-Russia Partnership Agreement.

This position has the support of Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, who in the Barents Council session in Murmansk said that “we should use the Northern Dimension and the different partnerships that we have to work on the Barents Region [and] I encourage the European Union and the Northern Dimension to keep working in the area.”⁶

The International Barents Secretariat (IBS), established in 2008, could be developed to play a more coordinating role in anchoring the Barents Cooperation in the EU. The IBS should facilitate coordination of activities with other regional organizations and initiatives active in the north, among them the Northern Dimension, the Council of Baltic Sea States, the Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, as well as strengthen the general role of the EU in the cooperation.

In addition, IBS could promote multilateral project financing, which is rather rare in the region today. This is also necessary because of the EU’s sophisticated financial mechanism for regional development. More than 35 percent of the overall EU budget is allocated for regional development programs, including cross-border activities.

New focus on the Barents Region

In the years to come, a new set of challenges will determine security policy developments in the Barents Region. The huge reserves of hydrocarbons and its strategic location with regard to transport and shipping make powerful states and international petroleum companies look towards the region. There is reason to believe that the prevailing security policy concept in the future first of all will be linked with *resources* and *environment*.⁷

The future of the Barents Cooperation will to a major extent depend on the political will and interest in the region itself. The people, who are living in the High North, have to take the initiative and themselves make the agenda. If not, they will be outplayed.

The national governments are focusing primarily on natural resources and climate change. However, the people living in the region first of all have an interest in a balanced social and economic development. As a matter of fact, a traditional romantic perception of the High North dominating in several government circles, might hamper development possibilities for the people who choose to live in the region.

In the years to come, the huge natural resource potential of the North will become object to increasing focus from the international oil and gas industry. The energy focus will to a new extent bring pragmatic «realpolitik» to the forefront in the High North. How will these new challenges and possibilities influence the Barents Cooperation as a region-building project?

The answer from us, people living in the region, is the following: the traditional people-to-people cooperation, and cooperation on indigenous peoples, environment, transport and education must be continued and strengthened.

Regional cooperation and energy

The coming to the region of Big Oil and powerful politics could result in the vitalization of the Barents Cooperation as a platform for political interaction. In the wake of this could follow also a stronger focus on «soft issues», with commitments to region-building and easier access to project funding.

From the Norwegian side, stronger regional cooperation appears as one of the responses to the oil and gas developments in the North. It is far from evident however, how the other three Barents countries will respond to the new challenges.

The decision to open one of the world's biggest offshore gas fields – the Shtokman field – will result in a leap forward in regional cooperation. As a matter of fact, this pro-

ject is a concrete manifestation of globalization in the north. The Shtokman project alone illustrates that the real challenges in Norwegian foreign policy are in the North and connected to our relations with Russia.

A stronger economic cooperation might be exactly what is needed to strengthen relations between people across the borders in the Barents Region. The security aspect of companies from Russia, France and Norway being partners in the Shtokman project is stabilizing the political situation in the North, and opening new possibilities for cooperation. The Barents Cooperation plays and has played the role of stimulator of contacts and cooperation in relations between Norway and Russia. It is a constant cooperation which is working every day, and which has given Norway both political and economical advantages.

European Border Dialogues

Expanded cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region has contributed substantially to stability and progress in the area, and thus indirectly also in Europe as a whole. The Barents cooperation initiative must be seen as part of an all-European process of strengthening European cooperation and integration.

The Barents Cooperation embodies the idea that increased cross-border contacts between humans and institutions will eventually improve general East-West relations in a region. Region-building processes are used as a security policy approach – as a way to promote peace and stability.

The fall of the Soviet Union and the enlargement of the EU has brought cross-border cooperation high the European agenda. In the Barents Region, 17 years of cross-border cooperation have given valuable knowledge and experience. Can these experiences be used to improve general East-West relations in the North of Europe, as well as more generally in other European regions with closed or troubled borders?

It is the conviction of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat that these experiences have relevant value also for other regions. Together with other European cross-border organizations, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat has therefore established a European border dialog network. That will give valuable contributions for sharing of European cross-border experiences.

Footnotes

- ¹ «Stenogramma vystupleniya i otvetov Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S.V.Lavrova na voprosy SMI v khode sovmestnoy press-konferentsii po itogam 12 sessii Soveta Barentseva/Evroarkticheskogo regiona v Murmanske, 15 oktyabrya 2009», *Mid.ru* (http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/44932EAC9F52994EC32576510037B582)
- ² XII Session of the Barents/Euro-Arctic Council Murmansk , 15 October, 2009, *Beac.st* (<http://www.barentsinfo.fi/beac/docs/All Documents of the XII Session of BEAC.pdf>)
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ *Kontseptsia vnesbney politiki rossiiskoi federatsii.* <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2008/07/204108.shtml>
- ⁵ «We are interested in the biggest possible facilitation of the border-crossing regime, and first of all for the people living in the border areas», Lavrov said. See «Stenogramma vystupleniya i otvetov Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S.V.Lavrova na voprosy SMI v khode sovmestnoy press-konferentsii po itogam 12 sessii Soveta Barentseva/Evroarkticheskogo regiona v Murmanske, 15 oktyabrya 2009», *Mid.ru* (http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/44932EAC9F52994EC32576510037B582)
- ⁶ XII Session of the Barents/Euro-Arctic Council Murmansk , 15 October, 2009, *Beac.st* <http://www.barentsinfo.fi/beac/docs/All Documents of the XII Session of BEAC.pdf>
- ⁷ Rafaelsen, Rune and Staalesen, Atle. «The Barents Cooperation — Region-Building and New Security Challenges» in *Development and Conflict Prevention*, (Anna Lindh Programme on Conflict Prevention 2005)



The Foreign Minister of Norway, Jonas Gahr Støre, and the Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, visiting the Norwegian – Russian border stations in June 2008. (Photo: Jonas Sjøkvist Karlsbakk)



Barents Council Meeting in Murmansk October 2009. Foreign ministers Jonas Gahr Støre of Norway, Carl Bildt of Sweden, Sergey Lavrov of Russia and Alexander Stubb of Finland. (Photo: Thomas Nilsen)



Former Foreign Minister of Norway, Thorvald Stoltenberg, at the unveiling of the bust of him, in Kirkenes 2006. (Photo: Jonas Sjøkvist Karlsbakk)

Connecting Barents people. The Barents Secretariat's programme in steady change

Margrethe Alnes

The founding agreement of the Barents Euro-Arctic Co-operation - the so-called «Kirkenes Declaration» - states that:

«Wider human contacts and increased cultural cooperation in the Region should be encouraged to promote constructive cooperation and good neighborly relations»¹.

Having initiated the regional Barents Co-operation and established the Barents Secretariat² in 1993, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs made funds available for the financing of co-operation projects. The purpose of the funds was to enable and encourage people to renew contacts across the newly reopened Norwegian-Russian border.

When the Barents Secretariat started supporting concrete projects, it decided to include activities within almost all sectors of society. In the period 1994-2009, the Barents Secretariat supported around 3000 small and middle-sized, mostly bilateral, projects implemented in the Barents Region by Russian and Norwegian partners. Five target areas were singled out: culture, competence, indigenous peoples' issues, economical development and environment. In addition, multilateral youth initiatives and smaller health-related projects can receive support through separate funding programmes.

The Barents Secretariat has handled applications and financed Norwegian-Russian projects for more than 15 years, and gained broad experiences in cross-border cooperation and knowledge of Russo-Norwegian affairs.

The Secretariat's grant programme has been adjusted with the growing experiences. What are the main changes that have been made in the grant programme? And what is the main motivation for today's continued strong focus on regional Norwegian-Russian project support?

Grant programme in steady change

The Norwegian Barents Secretariat is constantly reviewing its project financing management in order to keep it in line with the demands of the current social situation, both

in northern Norway and Northwest Russia. The Russian society of today is something radically different from what it was in 1994, when it struggled to reconstruct and re-develop its basic social, political and financial structures.

Russia has always been a demanding cooperation partner, and it continues to be so in 2009 when it is more powerful and rich than perhaps ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Norwegian Minister of foreign affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre, expressed his attitudes towards Russia's renewed strong position in a speech in Oslo in April 2008:

Russia's strengthened position and the challenges in the north give the regional cooperation structures a renewed relevance. Emphasized from Russian side: more initiative, more participation, more financing. Regional councils must be reorganised to reflect an equal and interest-based co-operation, not development aid.³

In 1994, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat chose a broad approach in its grant distribution. The attitude at the time was that almost any project idea and measure which involved joint work and contact between Russians and Norwegians in the Barents Region should be encouraged. «Let the thousand flowers bloom» was the slogan, and as long as some basic criteria were met, the applicant was likely to get support.

In the Barents Co-operation's childhood years, the Barents Secretariat would be willing to cover most of the Norwegian and Russian costs in a project. Even though the Secretariat formally has always required equality between the co-operation partners, the Russians were in the early days of the co-operation still to a much larger extent development aid receivers than equal partners with financial contributions.

In 2009, the situation was quite different. As opposed to in 1994, the project activity and management at the Secretariat is now strictly based on a principle of equal footing between the Russian and Norwegian partners. The Russian partners in a project are expected to take part in the planning and elaboration of the project plan, and to contribute actively in the project implementation. Thus, the Norwegian and Russian partners are experiencing a much stronger joint ownership in the projects. Russian co-financing in the cross-border Russian-Norwegian Barents projects occurs more and more often.

When the Norwegian research institute NIBR (Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research) conducted an evaluation of the Barents Secretariat's project administration in 2008, it came to the same conclusion:

The change into a more self-assertive, administratively efficient and economically dynamic Russia combined with the normalisation of travel and increase in labour migration across the borders, could have made the goals of the grant scheme cooperation obsolete, or at least made the typical Barents project «methodology» outdated. However, the evaluation shows that the project co-operation in the period from 2002 - 2006 on the whole was adapting to the new situation. As compared to the 1990s, there are less get-to-know-each-other activities and purely humanitarian projects funded by the Barents Secretariat. The element of material support from Norway to Russia within the project co-operation is decreasing. Projects that were stated up recently hardly include material transfers.⁴

Partners on equal terms

Russia's strengthened financial situation and willingness to put money into international project co-operation can be illustrated by the country's announced commitment to allocate around 122 million Euro to the cross-border programmes under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument.⁵

Similarly, in spite of the global financial crisis, almost 40 percent of the projects supported by the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in the first six months of 2009 were co-financed by Russian partners and Russian financial sources.

Still, some official statements from Moscow do raise concern about actual Russian positions towards cross-border projects with Western financing instruments. Former president Vladimir Putin on several occasions negatively described Russian receivers of foreign financial support and indicated serious implications for project staff.

In his October 2007 speech at the Luzhniki sport stadium in Moscow, the outgoing president said that: «Unfortunately, there are still people in the country, who like jackals hang around in foreign embassies, foreign diplomatic offices and rely on support from foreign funds and governments and not from their own people».⁶

These statements were one of the reasons why the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in 2008 changed its grant routines. Consequently, since March 2008 grants are only given to the Norwegian partners in co-operation projects.

The Barents Secretariat is careful not to support projects which are perceived politically sensitive by the Russian side. At the same time, however, it is important to bear in mind that the grant programme's main purpose is to provide financial means for Norwegian and Russian partners to meet and co-operate, and to encourage the establishment of new activities in the Barents Region. It has never been the intention from Norwegian side to use the grant programme as a means to meddle with Russian internal

affairs or to force Norwegian norms and values on the Russian society. Nevertheless, it is important that all levels and members of the societies in the north are given the opportunity to take part in the cross-border co-operation, not excluding any persons, organisations or institutions that wish to work with partners in their neighbouring country. The Barents Secretariat's project portfolio therefore includes activities for children and old people, Samis and Nenetsians, journalists and bishops, businessmen and artists, students and doctors, and further on – the list is extensive.

Pragmatic Russian approach

Contrary to the statements from Mr. Putin, attitudes from other central Russian politicians signal a strong interest in continued cooperation. In his speech at the Barents Council's meeting in Murmansk in October 2009, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke out for more cross border co-operation projects in the Barents Region:

We in Russia are thinking about how to help our participating regions with project financing. Perhaps, in the new conditions it is necessary to again calmly weigh up the expediency of establishing a BEAC bank or fund to co-finance projects at state parties' expense. More broadly, we would be prepared to positively consider the proposal by Sweden and Finland to soon organize a meeting of the economy ministers of our states to develop common approaches to the maintenance and expansion of the Barents cooperation.⁷

These remarks give reason to believe that there is an interest in the Russian government to encourage cross-border contact and co-operation in the north, despite the earlier concern-provoking announcements from other government representatives. Lavrov's statement is also an indication of a Russian willingness to finance project work when the Russian benefits and interests are present and obvious. As mentioned above, this indication is also reflected in the project portfolio of the Barents Secretariat, which shows a growing tendency of Russian co-financing in the projects.

Reflecting the official priorities

Besides letting the project support reflect the social situation in North Norway and Northwest Russia, the Secretariat is careful to make sure that the project programmes reflect national and regional priorities.

The Norwegian Government launched its High North strategy in December 2006. That strategy gave a broad outline of the Norwegian official plans for the development of the northern areas and of Norway's relationship and co-operation with Russia. In March 2009 the revision of the strategy and the plans for the next steps in the High North development stated that:

Priority is also given to people-to-people cooperation in the Barents region, with a particular focus on measures for young people, cultural projects and cooperation between indigenous peoples.⁸

With the new strategy in mind, the Barents Secretariat has given special priority in 2009 to project co-operation between Russian and Norwegian indigenous peoples. The establishment of the BarentsKult programme, which will be described further on, can also be seen as a direct answer to the Norwegian government's recent intensified focus on culture in the North.

New grant approach

The Secretariat's project financing is today to a growing extent channelled through target programmes, where the basic idea is to stimulate contact in especially interesting areas or to meet the demands in areas with a major need for financial support.

In addition to the Barents Regional Youth Programme and the Barents Secretariat's Health Fund, which have been running for some years already, two new financing structures have been established.

The BarentsKult-programme's aim is to contribute to the implementation of larger, professional art and cultural projects with a focus on the High North. These types of projects are usually too expensive to get funding from the Barents Secretariat's regular funds. Active support to cultural activities and business-based culture can contribute to regional development. BarentsKult can be seen as a long-term investment which, at least indirectly, can contribute to the creation of future work-places in the north.

In order to promote more Russian-Norwegian co-operation within the field of sports the Barents Secretariat has also established a financing programme for Norwegian-Russian sports co-operation; the Barents Sports Programme. That programme is designed to meet an increasing demand among northern Norwegian sport clubs and associations to meet and compete with Russian colleagues. The Secretariat has noticed that apart from filling a certain financing need in specific areas, the establishment of targeted financing programmes has resulted in the emergence of new project players and, furthermore, an increase in the number of applications in the specific areas.

Official statements show that Russia focuses on and is positive towards cross-border co-operation in areas which are meeting the country's various needs. According to Regional Development Minister Viktor Basargin, Russia wants its cross-border projects with the EU and Norway to focus on energy, transport infrastructure, innovation and small and medium-sized companies.⁹

A growing sectorial thinking, both on Norwegian and Russian side, makes it probable that the Barents Secretariat will continue to target its grant distribution into thematic programmes in the future as well. The broad approach, however, will most certainly remain at the core.

Continued project support?

Given the fact that Russia, as earlier mentioned, in 2009 appears to be on the right track when it comes to regaining her financial muscles, why should the Norwegian government, and the Barents Secretariat on its behalf, keep up its annual spending of millions of Norwegian kroner on Russian-Norwegian projects in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region?

In the course of the last ten years, with small variations, the number of applications for project support received by the Barents Secretariat has been on a steady level. The Secretariat handles from 350-400 project applications annually. Some project applicants have been running different co-operation projects for several years. Still, every year there is a number of new people and organisations joining the cross-border co-operation family. The conclusion is that the grant programme is filling a need; there is a strong wish among people in the Barents Region to meet across the borders and engage in joint project activities.

In its evaluation of the Barents Secretariat's grant programme, NIBR pointed out the same:

The survey among project leaders and participants shows that the Barents Secretariat fills a niche for project collaboration among Russian and Norwegian actors. The co-operation funded by the Barents Secretariat has given opportunities for increased interaction between Russian and Norwegian partners that otherwise would have been unlikely to take place. The major achievement, according to the survey respondents, has been the networks established between a large number of Russian and Norwegian partners. These networks appear to have been strengthened and broadened throughout the project period. Project owners as a rule appreciate the possibility to learn about practices on the other side of the border, and the mutual learning aspects are stressed by project participants in both Russia and Norway. Although competence development has been most prominent from Norway to Russia than the other way around, there has been considerable exchange and perceived mutual benefits for all the partners involved.¹⁰

Conclusively, the Barents Secretariat's grant programme is worth continuing because it gives results and positively contributes to the general development of the Barents Region. In the Norwegian government's opinion, the Norwegian-Russian project financing gives the Barents co-operation a concrete content:

Through the programme for project cooperation with Russia, which is administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government has allocated NOK 130 million in 2009 for cooperation projects that promote cross-border network building. The programme also contributes to giving practical substance to the multilateral Barents Cooperation.¹¹

In 2005, the Norwegian government singled out the High North as its most important area of interest. In its High North Strategy from 2006 the Barents co-operation and the cross-border project activities between Norwegian and Russian partners were given a prominent place:

People-to-people cooperation is an important part of Norway's High North policy. Health, education, culture, sport, child and youth work and volunteer activities are key components. Opportunities for people to come together to take part in joint activities in these areas foster mutual understanding and trust which again foster stability and development in the High North. The Government will seek to ensure that the Barents Cooperation continues to play an important role in creating meeting places and networks for people in the High North.

And further on:

In the context of our High North policy, it is vital to maintain close bilateral relations with Russia, which is both a neighbour and the country with which we share the Barents Sea. A number of the challenges in the High North in areas such as the environment and resource management can only be solved with Russia's engagement and Norwegian-Russian cooperation. Russia is undergoing rapid economic development. The changes that are taking place in the country's economy, society and politics do not affect the objectives of Norway's policy, but developments will be followed closely and instruments adapted accordingly. The Government's policy towards Russia is based on pragmatism, interests and cooperation.¹²

Also the policy platform of the reelected centre-left coalition government of October 2009 confirmed a commitment to continue the strong focus on the north:

«The High North will therefore continue to be the Government's most important strategic priority area in the foreign policy...»¹³, the statement reads.

Preparing for the future

Considering the fact that the High North is an area of major interest, not only in Norway, the Norwegian strategy in the years to come will most likely be a continuation of the political and financial commitments in the Barents region. These commitments are

encouraged by the positive Russian attitudes toward cross-border project work in the region. There is consequently no reason to assume that the grant programme of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat will be closed down in the foreseeable future.

The strong bilateral ties between Norway and Russia give reason to believe that the Barents Secretariat's grant programme in some form or another will continue to exist even without the formal framework of the Barents co-operation. Although the basic platform of the programme is the same as it was in the early days of its existence, there have in the course of the years been made several changes as to content and construction. Bearing in mind the changing societies in the north, the grant programme must continue to be a dynamic structure. In the years to come, we are most likely going to see a development where the project financing is more targeted. The Secretariat will continue the process of developing financing programmes where the grants come from several sources, not only from the Ministry of foreign affairs and the Secretariat itself.

To meet future challenges and contribute to wanted developments, the Secretariat will to a growing extent become a proactive project initiator. And finally - considering the steadily improving Russian financial situation, the grant programme will gradually grow into a financing instrument for measures where the Norwegian self-interest is the most prominent factor. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the programme should also take Russian priorities into consideration. Russian authorities are willing and able to put money into co-operation activities that are of special interest to them. By monitoring and reviewing the changing surroundings and conditions, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat is constantly adjusting its financing programme to make it suitable for the present and future cross-border co-operation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

Footnotes

- ¹ Declaration. Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. Conference of foreign ministers in Kirkenes, 11.1.1993
(http://www.barentsinfo.fi/beac/docs/459_doc_KirkenesDeclaration.pdf)
- ² Named the «Norwegian Barents Secretariat» since 2005
- ³ Jonas Gahr Støre, Russlandsdimensjonen i nordområdepolitikken, Rederiforbundets Nordområdeforum, Oslo 01.04.08 (http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/aktuelt/taler_arterikler/utenriksministeren/2008/russlandsdimensjonen.html?id=505888)
- ⁴ Building neighbourhood. Evaluation of the Barents Secretariat's grant programme. NIBR report 2008:4, p. 122
- ⁵ «600 million EUR for Russia-EU projects», *BarentsObserver.com*, (<http://www.barentsobserver.com/600-million-eur-for-russia-eu-projects.4488158-16149.html>) 4 June 2008
- ⁶ «Vystuplenie Vladimira Putina na forume svoikh storonnikov». *Vesti.ru*, 21 October 2007 (<http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=148531>)
- ⁷ «Summary of Remarks by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at the Twelfth Session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Murmansk, October 15, 2009», *Mid.ru* (http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/7B9F3FA142D4C805C32576510022113B)
- ⁸ *New building blocks in the north. The next step in the Government's High North strategy*, (http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/Nordomr%C3%A5dene/byggesteiner_nord.pdf) March 2009, p. 40
- ⁹ «Viktor Basargin prinyal uchastie v konferentsii po prigranichnomu sotrudnichestvu» *Minregion.ru* 28 September 2009
(<http://www.minregion.ru/WorkItems/NewsItem.aspx?NewsID=1401>)
- ¹⁰ Building neighbourhood. Evaluation of the Barents Secretariat's grant programme. NIBR report 2008:4, p. 62
- ¹¹ *New building blocks in the north. The next step in the Government's High North strategy*, March 2009, p. 41
- ¹² The Norwegian government's high north strategy, 2006, p. 9
- ¹³ New policy platform for the red-green coalition Government 2009-2013, 7 October 2009, p. 5



Barents Spektakel art installation in Kirkenes. «Rock around the watchtowers». (Photo: Knut Pettersen)





Ice hockey players from Kirkenes, Nickel and Zapolyarny are some of the important contributors to cross border sports cooperation. (Photo: Kirkenes Puckers)