Different languages, different cultural background and economical differences are all barriers that hamper development of cross-border projects and contacts between people in the Barents Region. The biggest challenge, however, is the paperwork up front of the actual border crossing between Russia and the other countries of the region.

It was one of the most closed borders in the world during the Cold War. You had to apply to the border authorities long time in advance to get permission to walk across the Storskog-Borisoglebsk checkpoint. With the coming of Glasnost, more Norwegians were allowed into the heavily militarized Kola Peninsula. By the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, also the first individual Russians started to travel to Norway.

In few years, the number of people crossing the border increased from hardly anyone to «almost everyone».

How do Norway and Russia today cooperate about border-crossing procedures? What can be done to make the Norwegian-Russian border a point for more smooth and flexible travel?

Welcome to the border-crossing exercises!

**Barbed wire fence**

Although the calendar now shows 2010, the inheritance from the Cold War with mutual suspiciousness is however not completely abandoned. Russia’s border to Norway and Finland is the only of Russia’s external borders to Western Europe where barbed wire fences still stand as a separation barrier. There is no such barrier along Russia’s border with Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, or Ukraine. In Asia, Russia has barbed wire fence along the border to China, Mongolia and North Korea.
Today, it is easy to say that the barbed wire fence along the border to the two friendly neighboring countries should have been taken down long ago. The fence is a symbol of a past time. Unfortunately however, it is not the only barrier hampering border-crossing between the neighbours.

**See, but don’t touch**

Less than one out of five of the inhabitants in the Russian town of Nikel have ever been in Norway, despite the fact that they can see Norway from of their kitchen windows every day.\(^1\) The border is just few kilometres from the town, while the actual road border-crossing point is some half hour drive from Nikel.

Why then, are so few crossing the border?

The poll made on behalf of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat among the border population partly gives the answers. The figures show that only 18 percent of the inhabitants in the Russian border municipality Pechenga, including the towns of Nikel and Zapoljarny, have ever been to Norway. In the same poll, the follow up question was «Would you go to Norway if the visa regulations are abolished?» \(^8\) 87 percent of the respondents gave a clear «yes» to that question. This leads to the conclusion that the current visa-regulations hamper the interest among the near-border population to actually visit their neighbour country.\(^2\)

The Norwegian Barents Secretariat made a similar poll in 2005. Back then, 17,5 percent of the inhabitants of Pechenga said they had been to Norway.\(^3\) In the years after 2005, there has been a relatively high focus on cross-border cooperation with new twin-cities initiatives between Pechenga and Sør-Varanger, measures from both the Norwegian and Russian Foreign Ministries to increase the near-border cooperation and new possibilities to obtain multi-entry visas to Norway valid for several years. Despite all this, the actual number of locals in Pechenga that have crossed the border increased by less than one percent in the period from 2005 to 2009.

The same poll also shows that a larger percentage of the inhabitants of Murmansk city have been to Norway. Compared with 18 percent in Pechenga, 26 percent of the respondents in Murmansk said they have been to Norway.\(^4\)

**Norwegians wants to visit Russia**

Also on the Norwegian side of the border, a poll indicates that more locals will cross the border if the visa regime is facilitated. The Finnmark University College and the Barents Institute in 2009 made a study among Norwegians in the near-border areas. 46
percent of the respondents said it was «very likely» that they would travel more to Russia if they could get a kind of permanent visa, or if it existed a visa-free travel regime.\(^5\)

Few Norwegians actually visit the near-border towns of Nikel and Zapolyarny when they go to Russia. Most travel to Murmansk, even those living near the border. This can be explained by a number of reasons; Murmansk is the nearest big city with rich cultural life, restaurants, huge shopping malls and a wide range of other businesses. The border towns of Nikel and Zapolyarny on the other hand are both typical Russian «monogoroda,» (monotowns) with a single industrial plant and mines that dominate the local economy.

**Expensive visa**

On the Russian side, the costs and fees associated with obtaining a visa to Norway is still considered to be relatively high for people with ordinary income. The visa fee of 1,500 rubles (35 EUR) is standard. However, the latest visa agreement between Norway and Russia makes exemptions for visa fee for a number of categories; i.e. children under the age of six, school pupils, family members visiting relatives, students, some researchers and some groups of people participating in the Barents cooperation.\(^6\)

In addition to the visa-fee, an associated cost is the fee for obtaining a foreign passport.\(^7\) Then come the travel costs to the Norwegian Consulate General in Murmansk, and the administrative costs if people use a travel agency to arrange the visa procedure for them. For inhabitants of even more remote areas, for instance in Arkhangelsk Oblast, travel and/or administrative procedures to actually get a visa to Norway from the Murmansk-based consulate is far more difficult. The distance from Kotlas in southern Arkhangelsk Oblast to Murmansk is more than 1,000 kilometres as the crow flies. It takes several days to travel by train and such places do not have travel agencies to do the visa handling job for you.

The last years, a number of new measures have been taken in order to ease the visa regime for citizens of the Russian part of the Barents Region. In 2007, the new EU-Russian visa-agreement came into force, while the Norway-Russia agreement was signed on June 8\(^{th}\) the same year, and came into force in 2008.

The agreement stipulates several measures on visa facilitation, i.e. a maximum time for handling the applications, a maximum price and the introduction of multi-entry visas valid up to five years. For Russians travelling to Norway, the introduction of the so-called Pomorvisa, a specially designed visa for citizens of Murmansk Oblast and Arkhangelsk Oblast, means they can apply for visa without having an invitation from a Norwegian partner.\(^8\)
Another Norwegian initiative supposed to lighten the visa application procedure is the introduction of visa application via web. However, in practice the online visa application portal is not very useful for applicants living in other cities than Murmansk. Applicants from other areas still have to deliver their passport, photo and insurance papers personally at the consulate. Driving from Nikel to Murmansk and back takes a day. When you then have to travel to Murmansk again the week after to pick up your visa, the introduction of online visa-applications can hardly be said to have made things easier for neither the borderland population, nor people living farther away from Murmansk.

A travel agent in Nikel said after the introduction of the new online application system in early 2009: «It seems like the new regulations have been made to ease the work of the employees of the Norwegian General Consulate in Murmansk, and not to ease the process for visa applicants.»

**Rolling visa-office**

Several ideas on how to make it easier for near-border citizens to get visas, and even establish a visa-free travel regime, were presented in the course of 2009. Both the former governor of Murmansk, Yury Yevdokimov, and municipality mayor of Sør-Varanger, Linda Randal, suggested establishing a local branch office of the Norwegian Consulate in Nikel.

Another idea about how to make visa application procedures easier for inhabitants outside the city of Murmansk is hereby launched: Use a rolling visa-office, based on the model of the library buses operating in remote areas of Norway. Such a visa-bus, operated by the staff of the consulate, could visit Nikel on Mondays, Zazolyarny on Tuesdays, Apatity on Wednesdays etc. and in this way cover all main cities on the Kola Peninsula. Then, people can deliver their applications to the visa-bus at their local town-square and pick up the visa when the bus returns the week after. Today, the Norwegian Consulate issues visas also on behalf of Sweden and the Netherlands, and an agreement about the same arrangement with Finland could easily be made.

Since Russia has a general consulate in Kirkenes, the visa challenges for the population living in the near-border areas on the Norwegian side is less problematic. Still, however, all Norwegians need a valid invitation from a Russian partner, hotel or travel agency before delivering their visa applications. To get an invitation for tourist purposes is easy and not too costly, ranging from NOK 150 up to 500 (18-60 EUR). Business invitations or other types of visas are more difficult to get and the associated cost is higher. This is mainly because in most such cases you need invitations directly from your Russian partner or organization.
In addition, there is a visa handling charge of NOK 315 (35 EUR). For people from other places in Northern Norway than Kirkenes, obtaining a visa to Russia is more difficult. A travel agency can assist with tourist visas, but will charge an extra fee and it requires extra time due to the mailing of the passport to the Kirkenes-, or Oslo based travel agency. The Russian consulate in Kirkenes does not allow people to mail their passports directly to them. The applications and passports must either be delivered personally, or through a travel agency.

The Russian visa system is somewhat more complicated than the Schengen visa rules. If the aim of the visit to Russia is to participate in a seminar or conference, you are i.e. not allowed to enter with an ordinary tourist visa. In the course of 2009, several Norwegian delegations got into trouble with Russian immigration authorities because of misunderstandings and wrong visa types. Tourist visa, private visa, business or humanitarian visa, journalist visa, transit visa and visa for work and study are some of the visas types with clear difference. The problems are often the grey-zones in between, which are difficult to understand and often interpreted differently depending on the city you travel to, or the Russian officials checking your documents.

**Visa-free travel in Border Zone**

When Foreign Ministers Sergey Lavrov and Jonas Gahr Støre in June 2008 together visited the Norwegian-Russian border; they also initiated talks about establishing a visa-free border zone, stretching 30 kilometres from the border into each country. People living in the zone should be able to cross the border without visa as long as they stay in the 30 kilometre range.

An official Russian proposal on the issue was presented to Norwegian authorities in autumn 2008. According to that, the inhabitants of the area should be entitled to get an ID-card allowing them to cross the border without passport and visa control. The 30 kilometres zone on each side of the border would cover most of the Pechenga and Sør-Varanger municipalities, including the towns of Nikel, Zapolyarny and Kirkenes. However, the ID-card will only allow travels within the zone, which means that a person from Nikel who enters Norway with the ID-card, travels to Kirkenes and then decides to go somewhere else in Norway or Europe, will have to return home, apply for a visa, wait, and then cross the border with full passport and visa control. The same will apply for a Kirkenes inhabitant who visits Nikel and then for instance wants to go to Murmansk.

If introduced, the inhabitants of the border zone would get a priority-lane at both the Norwegian and Russian border checkpoints, thus making the border-crossing easier. However, they will still be subject to customs control and vehicle inspection. The border
zone ID-card is supposed to be less costly than a passport and valid visa. However, except for that, such visa-free travel will hardly clear away anything that a multi-entry visa cannot. Many of the same results can be achieved by removing some of the obstacles to get a valid Schengen visa as described above.

The following Norwegian measures can bring along the same wanted reliefs for the near-border inhabitants as the border zone ID-card can:

- Establish a visa-facilitation point in Nikel/Zapolyarny (i.e. visa-bus or a consulate office)
- Exempt visa-fee charge for inhabitants in Sør-Varanger and Pechenga.
- Establish a priority lane at the border crossing points for frequent travellers and commuters, including electronic registration of vehicles.
- Biometric passport control without stamps in the passports (only electronic registration). The passport control will allow the driver and possible also the passengers to remain in their cars for the inspection.

These steps can be implemented without any new agreements. The existing Norwegian-Russian visa agreement and the Schengen Border Code make such implementations possible. Similar implementations need to be put into force on the Borisgleb border-crossing point on the Russian side. In the longer run, this same easy travel regime is desirable for all non-third-country travellers crossing the Norwegian-Russian border. This should be considered an intermediate step, applied until the introduction of visa-free travel between Russia and the EU.¹⁸

When discussing challenges for near-border travel and steps to facilitate visa-freedom in a 30 kilometre range on each side of the border, many Norwegians will point at today’s Russian border regime. The Border Security Zone is the strip of land from the border to neighbouring countries like Norway and 25 kilometres inside Russian territory. Here, economic activity and access is restricted without permission from the FSB. The different rules and sub-normative acts are changing frequently, and in practice a foreigner is only allowed to be in transit along the main highway (E105 / M18), or stop in the towns of Nikel, Zapolyarny and at the Titovka road café. All other turns from the main road are strictly forbidden without prior permission from FSB, and violation(s) of these rules may result in expulsion from Russia for several years.¹⁹

**Service and new technology**

A biometric border control system is nothing new. In 2008 the Finnish border guard started the testing and use of an automatic border control system based on biometric identification at the Helsinki-Vantaa airport.²⁰
Also, border crossing points where passengers are allowed to remain in their cars for the duration of the inspection exist at the Schengen-Russian external border point in Estonia (Narva-1 and Koidula).\textsuperscript{21} In the Barents Region, Finland’s border crossing point at Salla allows some of the travellers to remain seated in their vehicles during passport inspection.\textsuperscript{22}

Unfortunate, there is a difference between the Finnish and Norwegian approach to visa- and border crossing questions related to Russia. While Finland appears to read the Schengen regulations with an aim to facilitate border crossing with Russia, Norway seems to read the words of the Schengen regulations much stricter.\textsuperscript{23}

There are many reasons for the differences between the Norwegian and Finnish practice, but important to mention are Finland’s southern border crossing points to Russia where far more people cross than in the remote Norwegian-Russian far north. Russian visitors to Helsinki constitute an important income source for local business. The positive impact of Russians in the Finnish capital, where the country’s decision-making units are located, for sure also has a positive impact on the people giving the instructions and rules on visa- and border regimes. In Norway, on the contrary, Oslo’s interest in the Russian border far up in the north can be said to be limited. In addition; many official representatives from Oslo still bear the imprint of the Cold War relations with Russia. Norway’s Foreign Minister for the last four years, Jonas Gahr Støre, has held a high profile when it comes to facilitating visa regime and border crossing with Russia. However, other ministries, and sub directorates, have so far not managed to follow up the intentions expressed by the foreign minister.

**Border station infrastructure**

Infrastructural conditions are important for an increase in border crossings between Norway and Russia. A project working group established by the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police estimates a doubling in the number of people crossing the border to 200,000 people annually in the nearest future.\textsuperscript{24} In 2008, a total of 104,584 people crossed the Storskog-Borisoglebsk checkpoints.\textsuperscript{25} Over the last ten years, the number of border-crossings has exceeded 100,000 annually, with a peak in year 2000 when 131,145 people passed.\textsuperscript{26} The Norwegian project group proposes to build a brand new border station at Storskog in order to meet the increased number of travelers. This initiative is of course welcomed as long as the main goal is to provide better service for the travelers and make the border crossing itself less time-consuming.

The existing Norwegian border station has been extended and rebuilt several times after the end of the Cold War, when more people started to travel between Russia and Norway in the north. In 1990, only 8,000 people crossed this only direct border between
a NATO member country and the USSR in northern Europe. Today’s Norwegian border station is crowded to capacity in the peak-hours. Good infrastructural conditions are necessary, both for the border staff to be able to fulfill their duties effectively and to ensure appropriate treatment of the travelers. The border station’s location in harsh Arctic climate makes the infrastructure especially important. Today, there are no large indoor garage hall where truck cargo can be unloaded for Customs inspections. Neither is there an x-ray scanner for vehicles.

The proposal to build a new border station includes all needed infrastructure for the foreseeable future. If the plans, estimated to cost between 17 – 27 million NOK, will be approved in the governmental budget for 2011, the new border station could be ready by 2013/2014.27

**Borisoglebsk border station**

In 2003, the new Borisoglebsk border station was opened on the Russian side of the border. The border station was financed by Norway and built by Norwegian constructors. The opening ceremony was held at the same time as the 10-year anniversary celebration of the Barents Cooperation in January 2003. The main reason for Norway’s assistance was to facilitate the travellers’ needs by moving the Russian border station closer to the actual border. The former station was located some 15 kilometers from the border.

Despite the fact that today’s border stations are located only 200 meters from each other, there is very little contact between the Norwegian and Russian border officials. No phone, fax or electronic contacts exist and the officials do not themselves cross the border to meet and solve simple questions regarding i.e. travellers’ documents or visas. Questions are solved in meetings between the border commissioners, as well as in the less frequent meetings between the chief of police in Eastern Finnmark and the FSB border guard service.

However, also this border station is now crowded to capacity in peak hours. This makes it hard to predict the duration of the border crossing. A driver, with a few passengers in the car, can manage to do the passport control, fill in all needed customs declarations and have the car inspected in 20 minutes if there are no other cars in the lane. But if you line up in a queue of other cars, and maybe end up behind a bus or two filled with passengers, the border crossing could take several hours. Compared with more southern border crossing points to Russia, the queues at the Norwegian-Russian border are still close to non-existent. One example is the Finnish border to Russia at Vaalimaa, where the queue has been several tens of kilometres long, due to slow and insufficient official procedures on the Russian side.28
Among the other challenges for Norwegian travellers to Russia are the frequent changes in customs rules and regulations on foreign vehicles crossing the border. In combination with incomprehensive information-guidelines and the border officials’ lack of foreign language knowledge, the procedures can be frustrating and often superfluous time-consuming. In both border stations, inadequate knowledge and language skills prevent border guards, customs officials and traffic authorities from effectively communicating with travellers. This also impedes them from carrying out their duties.

**Increasing cargo traffic**
The expanding economical cooperation in the Barents Region will lead to increased cargo traffic across the border. Alone the development of the Shtokman field in the Barents Sea will require more efficient capacities, and multi-languages personnel at the border crossing points will be essential.

Today, the border is only open for traffic between 7 am and 9 pm Norwegian time (9 am to 11 pm Russian time). A proposal to extend the opening hours to from 6 am to 11 pm Norwegian time (8 am to 1 am Russian time) was in principle agreed upon by both countries in 2007. This change, which is still expected to come into force soon, will be especially important for cargo traffic from Norway to Russia, which if crossing the border in early morning would be able to declare goods at the central customs location in Murmansk and continue to the final destination in the course of one day.

**Distance to Moscow and Oslo**
Conclusively, many positive measures have been implemented in order to ease border crossing between Norway and Russia over the past 20 years.

However, a lot still remains to be done before border crossing on Europe’s northernmost border between a Schengen member state and Russia is smooth. This chapter shows that the inhabitants in the Barents Region in general, and the near-border inhabitants in specific, are the driving force in making the border more open. To shorten the mental distance between the actual border crossing point and the decision-making units in Moscow and Oslo is maybe what needs to be done first in this Border Crossing Exercise.
Footnotes

1 Cross-border poll – Murmansk Oblast. FORIS, 2009 (see appendix 1).

2 Upon writing this chapter, the author discussed the border-crossing regime with locals in the town of Nikel that frequently travels to Norway.

3 «Norge-Russland – Vekstpotensial for samhandel i grenseregionen,» the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, April 2009.

4 Cross-border poll – Murmansk Oblast. FORIS, 2009. See Appendix 1

5 The political perceptions of borders and border policies, A. Viken and A. Espiritu – October 2009.

6 The Norwegian-Russian visa agreement was signed by Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and President Vladimir Putin in St. Petersburg, June 9th – 2007.

7 Citizens of the Russian Federation have a domestic passport, and need an additional foreign passport for travelling abroad.

8 For detailed information, see the visa-section of the Norwegian Embassy in Moscow at www.norvakia.ru.

9 Norwegian Directorate of Immigration – (https://selfservice.udi.no/visaportal/)


13 Russia has two visa-issuing consulates in Norway; Kirkenes and Oslo.


16 «Visa-free travel in Norwegian-Russian borderlands.» BarentsObserver.com  

17 Storskog grenseovergangssted – Funksjons- og behovsanalyse,  
Statsbygg nr 11733, 2009-10-29.

18 «Visa-free travel – a brilliant project.» BarentsObserver.com  
(http://www.barentsobserver.com/visa-free-travel-a-brilliant-project.4533560-16174.html),  
2008-12-10.

19 For updated rules about the Russian Border Security Zone,  
see: ПОГРАНИЧНАЯ СЛУЖБА РОССИИ, www.fsb.ru

2 The Finnish Border Guard. www.raja.fi

2 Gateways to Europe – Checkpoints on the EU External Land Border.  

2 «Easier border crossing between Russia and Finland», BarentsObserver.com  

23 Paper from the working group set up by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affair with the  
aim to look into possibilities to ease the border crossing regime, Oslo – 2007.

24 Storskog grenseovergangssted – Funksjons- og behovsanalyse,  
Statsbygg nr 11733, 2009-10-29.

25 «Less border-crossings.» BarentsObserver.com  

26 The Norwegian Border Commissioner. www.grensekom.no

27 Storskog grenseovergangssted – Funksjons- og behovsanalyse,  
Statsbygg nr 11733, 29 October 2009

28 «Vaalimaa Truck Line Down to Six Kilometres», YLE News  

29 The Norwegian-Russian border is the only land-border in Europe with two hours time  
difference.
A Norwegian conscript on dog patrol at the Norwegian - Russian border. (Photo: Thomas Nilsen)
Entering the Russian border station at Borisoglebsk. (Photo: Thomas Nilsen)
A rolling visa-office, based on the model of the library buses operating in remote areas of Norway, could visit Nikel, Zapolyarny and Apatity, and in this way cover all main cities on the Kola Peninsula. (Photo collage illustration)
Cross-border security cooperation

Trude Pettersen

Cross-border cooperation and confidence between Norwegians and Russians have developed positively in the years since the break-up of the Soviet Union. So has also the relationship between the military forces guarding the respective sides of the border.

After a period of low activity and hardships following the break-up of the Soviet Union and the economic crisis in the late 1990s, Russia’s military activities in the vicinity of Norway increased considerably in the years after 2000, both at sea, in the air and, and to a lesser degree, on land. The Norwegian Ministry of Defense estimates that Russia has spent 12-15 billion USD on modernizing and strengthening its Murmansk-based northern defenses since 2004. Norwegian military officials have seen this increased activity as a result of the improved Russian economy. Rear Admiral Trond Gryptting, who until August 1th 2009 held the position as Head of the Norwegian Regional Command in Northern Norway¹, said in an interview in July 2008 that he did not see any threat from the increased Russian military activities in the north. On the contrary, he believed the modernization of the Russian Armed Forces is a sign of a more healthy state: «For a state it is a sign of good health that the military is in order».²

The Arctic has lately been called «a region of high conflict potential».³ Increased attention is being given to the region as climate change is making shipping routes better navigable and the presumed natural resources more accessible. Experiences from the Norwegian-Russian border show however that this is also a region with a considerable cooperation potential. The Norwegian and Russian military cooperate more closely than ever, with several meetings being held every year between military leaders, as well as with daily contact on operational level. Military leaders stress the importance of establishing good personal relationships across the border and see this as an important basis for informal contact in case a situation should occur. Better knowledge about each other’s work is important for better cooperation.

While cooperation between NATO and Russia has experienced hard times over the last years, the Norwegian-Russian military cooperation in the north has remained seemingly unaffected by the higher level relations. Bilateral relations remained the same with frequent meetings even during the Georgia crisis in August 2008. On several
Cross-border security operation

occasions in 2009, both Russian and Norwegian military leaders have underlined that the relationship has «never been better».

This chapter will mainly focus on cooperation and contact between Norway’s and Russia’s border guard and coast guard services, and with special attention to the year 2009. How are relations being shaped between the two parts?

Border Guard organization and cooperation

The border between Norway and Russia was delineated only in 1826, thus making this area the last part of Norway to come under Norwegian jurisdiction. The border has since then never been changed, though for twenty years (1920-1940) it was a border between Norway and Finland. The biggest part of this border coincides with natural boundaries – 153 km go along rivers and lakes and only 43 km is a conventional line on dry-land. It is one of the most stable of all Russia’s external boundaries.

Sovereignty enforcement of the Norwegian border to Russia is a three-agency operation. East Finnmark Police District is responsible for prosecution, fines and processing of illegal immigrants, asylum seekers and border violations. The Border Commissioner is the policymaking and diplomatic department. It arranges contacts and meetings with its Russian counterpart, makes agreements and rules and constitutes a substantial part of the diplomatic process. Finally, the Sør-Varanger Border Guard Garrison (GSV) is responsible for military border patrol by its conscript soldiers. The unit’s training facilities and headquarters are located at Høybuktmoen, 14 kilometers outside Kirkenes. The garrison has six border guard stations along the border. The commander of GSV is also Deputy Border Commissioner.

The Norwegian Coast Guard on the other hand is subordinated to the Norwegian Navy and has its northern squadron based in Sortland, near the city of Tromsø.

The Russian side of the border is protected by professional soldiers from the Border Guard Service, subordinated to the Federal Security Service, FSB. The unit’s headquarters are located in Nikel. Commander of the FSB’s Border Guard Service in Murmansk Oblast is also Border Commissioner for the border to Norway. The unit is responsible for protection of Russia’s border to Norway both on land and at sea.

Regular meetings, joint exercises and other activities

Representatives from the Norwegian and Russian border guard services meet 50-60 times per year. The commanders from both sides meet approximately 15 times per year, while their respective assistants meet far more often.
Joint exercises between Norwegian and Russian border guard services have been conducted on a regular basis since 2004. The purpose of these exercises is to improve warning procedures and routines for handling of incidents like illegal crossing of the border. In the recent years, both Russian and Norwegian media have been invited to attend the exercises, and especially Russian media – both television and newspapers, have been eager to publish reports from the events. The Russian side is actively using media coverage from these exercises as a means of discouragement against illegal border crossing and reports have been broadcasted nationwide.

The Norwegian and Russian border guard services organize several joint activities aimed at strengthening the bonds between them. In March every year since 1994, the Barents Ski Race (the Russians call it the Friendship Ski Race) gathers around one thousand civilian and military participants in the Russian border guard detachment of Rajakoski. The twelve kilometers long track runs on Russian, Finnish and Norwegian territory, and border guard soldiers and officers from all the three countries participate. For ten years in a row Norwegian and Russian border guard soldiers have met in Kirkenes for a soccer match as part of the Kirkenes Days town festival. Border Commissioners and officers from both sides of the border bring their families to the event.

**Coast Guard**

Of the other military branches with a developed cooperation with Russia in the North, the Navy and Coast Guard are probably the most active. Vessels from the two countries have on several occasions visited the other country, and joint exercises are not unusual.

Norway and Russia face common challenges in their northern waters when it comes to management and control of natural resources, and first of all marine bio-resources. In the period 2005-2009, Rear Admiral Trond Grytting, Head of the Regional Command in Northern Norway (LDKN) was the commander-in-chief of both the border guard service and the coast guard in Northern Norway. His personal contributions in improving Norwegian-Russian relations on security issues have been considerable. He has met with his Russians colleagues on regular basis, normally three times per year, since he entered office.

In these official meetings, information is being exchanged, and an official protocol confirming the cooperation between Norwegian and Russian authorities on coast guard, border guard and search-and-rescue services is updated and signed.

The well-established contact between the commanders and the continuing exchange of information on operational level have on several occasions resulted in detection and prevention of fish fraud like overfishing, illegal transshipment or dumping.
Norway and Russia have two agreements on exchange of fishery inspectors in the Barents Sea. The first agreement was concluded in the mid-1990s and covers the two countries’ economic zones. In 2006, a new agreement was signed, which covers the so-called Grey Zone. Exchange of inspectors is made twice per year. The cod stock in the Barents Sea cod is the world’s largest and is jointly regulated by the two countries. The last years’ efforts to utilize this stock in a sustainable way have been successful, and the spawning stock is now the largest in decades.

2009 was an active year in Norwegian-Russian Navy and Coast Guard cooperation. In March 2009, Rear Admiral Gyrting met with General Vyacheslav Biryukov, Head of the Murmansk Oblast branch of the Federal Security Service (FSB) in Kirkenes for a planning meeting. The two men have over the last years strengthened formal and informal contacts.

The two high-ranking officers both emphasized the close military cooperation between Norway and Russia in the north, and General Biryukov stressed how much easier it has become to keep up contact:

> There are no secrets when we meet and we have an open and trustful dialogue. Earlier I had to write a letter every time I wanted to meet with my Norwegian colleague. Today, if there is anything I would like to discuss, I can just call Rear Admiral Gyrting without further notice. 

Both leaders underlined that increased knowledge about each other’s work is important for better cooperation, and more frequent exchange of personnel and equipment will therefore be a priority point in the development of relationships for the next period.

The return visit took place in Murmansk in the first week of September. Rear Admiral Gyrting led a delegation of higher Norwegian coast guard and border guard officials, including Head of Coast Guard Squadron North, Commander Steve Olsen and Head of Sør-Varanger Garrison and Deputy Border Commissioner Jørn Erik Berntsen.

The delegation arrived in Murmansk with Norway’s newest coastguard vessel, the «KV Barentshav», only nine days after the vessel’s naming ceremony. The ship anchored up in Murmansk harbor, next to the world’s first civilian nuclear ice breaker, the 50 years old and now retired «Lenin».

The meeting was the first after Norway in August 2009 moved its National Joint Headquarter to Bodø, near the Arctic Circle. That moving in many ways symbolizes Norway’s increasing focus on the High North, an area of top domestic and international priority for the country.
The coast guard and border guard officials discussed issues like the situation on the Norwegian-Russian border, fishery inspections in the Barents Sea and the establishment of a joint web-based communication mechanism for the two countries’ coast guards.

«Regular meetings like these and good contacts between officers are very important for the support of joint interests within the field of control and security, but also in order to prevent misunderstandings and conflict in difficult situations», Mr. Grytting said after the meeting.

The Russians were shown around in the «KV Barentshav», while the Norwegians had a chance to see Russia’s newest coast guard vessel «Sprut».

**Barents Rescue**

Barents Rescue – Russia’s largest international rescue exercise – is a series of field training exercises that are jointly organized and conducted by Russia, Norway, Sweden and Finland within the framework of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. The hosting of the exercise rotates between the four countries. The aim of the Barents Rescue cooperation is to improve the possibilities for rescue agencies to cooperate on emergency and rescue issues across county and country borders in the Barents Region.

Risk scenarios for major accidents, natural disasters, and man-made emergencies show many similarities in the Barents Region. In all the four countries there are long distances between the economic centers, sparsely populated rural communities, limited rescue personnel and equipment, and restricted means for transport and hospital resources available in case of larger accidents.

The 2009 exercise – the fourth since 2001 – took place in Murmansk Oblast and included the following scenarios: joint alarm between countries in case of a major emergency; search and rescue operations at sea; extinguishing of a forest fire in the border zone between the countries; rescue operations after a major traffic accident; rescue operations after a major oil spill on water.

In a meeting with the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in summer 2009, Admiral Grytting said he was impressed by the preparations made by the Russians side ahead of the Barents Rescue training. He also highlighted the importance of both the Northern Fleet and the FSB participating in the training.
Norwegian Border Commissioner visited closed area

In October 2009, Norwegian Border Commissioner Colonel Ivar Magne Sakserud visited the Rybachiy Peninsula, thus becoming the first Norwegian officer ever to be permitted entry to the closed area.

During World War II, the peninsula was an arena of a positional war between the Nazi Germans and the Soviets. The peninsula covered the access to Murmansk and Arkhangelsk, which were the main gates for the Lend-Lease program. The front split the peninsula in two parts, both sides having heavily fortified positions.

During the Cold War, the Rybachiy Peninsula was heavily militarized because of the proximity to the border to Norway and NATO. The area is still used as training fields for the Northern Fleet’s naval infantry.

Colonel Sakserud was shown around the peninsula by his Russian counterpart, Colonel Vladmir Bobrov. Both commissioners emphasize the good relationship between the two sides. Sakserud says he sees the fact that he was allowed to see the closed areas as a proof of the good relationship between the two sides:

“This vote of confidence proves that our relationship and cooperative climate with the Russians is very good. Even when relationships on higher echelons are complicated, things function on our level.”

Northern Fleet commander visits Norway

Meetings between upper level Norwegian and Russian military officials are usually held once a year, alternating between Norway and Russia as host for the events. In October 2009, Commander of the Northern Fleet Vice Admiral Nikolay Maksimov was on a three days long visit to Norway. His Norwegian host was Chief of Operational Command Head Quarters Lieutenant General Bernt Iver Ferdinand Brovold.

“Meetings like these strengthen ties between our two neighboring countries, give us enhanced knowledge about each other and build confidence”, said General Brovold. The Russian admiral visited the Norwegian Navy’s main base in Bergen, the country’s largest air force base in Bodø and the new high security Operational Command HQ in Bodø, which opened on August 1th 2009.

As part of the three days long visit to Norway, Vice-Admiral Maksimov visited the Barents Secretariat’s office together with General Brovold. After hearing about the Barents Secretariat’s activities, both the high ranking officers emphasized the importance of good communication and cooperation both on military and civilian levels to maintain peace and stability:
«The relationship between two states is never better than the friendship between the peoples living there», said Lieutenant General Brovold, «that is why all measures taken to enhance such friendship are important».  

«In our discussions General Brovold and I have come to the conclusion that the High North is more peaceful than other regions», Admiral Maksimov said. «The Northern Fleet will always be ready to support institutions like the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in their work in securing stability in the northern areas».  

Admiral Maksimov’s visit to Norway was preceded by a planning meeting in Severomorsk by Grytting and Maksimov. Grytting arrived in Severomorsk with one of Norway’s new top modern frigates, the Fridtjof Nansen-class «KNM Otto Sverdrup». This official visit was the first to Russia made by one of the new Royal Norwegian Navy’s frigates.

**Cooperation is key to stability**  
The Norwegian-Russian borderland is today an area of stability and cooperation between the military units on the respective sides of the border. The established cross-border contacts, personal relations and joint activities have been instrumental in upholding and stimulating the good relations. The border guard services have developed an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding.

This development has run parallel to the generally positive trends in civilian cross-border cooperation.

In connection with the 15 years anniversary for the Barents cooperation in 2008, Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said that the good relationship between the Norwegian and Russian border guard services has been an important factor in improving relations also on the civilian side of society.  

As remarked by Admiral Maksimov, civilian structures like the Norwegian Barents Secretariat play an important role in providing alternative security policy approaches through people-to-people contacts across the border.
Cross-border security operation

Footnotes

1 On August 1 2009, Rear Admiral Trond Grytting took over the position as Deputy Commander of the National Joint Headquarters

2 «Ikke bekymret for russisk militære», NRK.no, (http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/distrikt/troms_og_finnmark/1.6123560), 2 July 2008

3 Alexandrov, Oleg: «Labyrinths of the Arctic Policy», Russia in Global Affairs No3, July-September 2009

4 The position is currently held by Colonel Vladmir Bobrov (2009).


7 «Grensekommisær i ny teig», Mil.no, (http://www.mil.no/start/article.jhtml?articleID=189522), 29 September 2009

8 «Militært toppmøte i Norge», Mil.no, (http://www.mil.no/start/aktuelt/article.jhtml?articleID=189895) 12 October 2009

9 General Brovold in meeting at the Norwegian Barents Secretariat 10 October 2009

10 Admiral Maksimov in meeting at the Norwegian Barents Secretariat 10 October 2009

Russian Border Commissioner Colonel Vladimir Bobrov and Norwegian Border Commissioner Colonel Ivar Magne Sakserud. (Photo: Trude Pettersen)
Norwegian Rear Admiral Trond Grytting and Russian General Vyacheslav Biryukov in front of the Russian 2WW memorial in Kirkenes. (Photo: Jonas Sjøkvist Karlsbakk)
Russian Vice Admiral Nikolay Maksimov and Norwegian Lieutenant General Bernt Iver Ferdinand Brovold during their meeting at the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in Kirkenes.
(Photo: Jonas Sjøkvist Karlsbakk)
Joint border exercise for Norwegian and Russian border guards. (Photo: Trude Pettersen)
A unit of the Russian border guards on parade. (Photo: Thomas Nilsen)