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## Swedish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council 2017–2019: Key Results and Achievements\*

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**Abstract.** The Barents Euro-Arctic Region is an integration of states and their administrative divisions, markedly different in terms of population living standards, but with a particular affinity that affords firm ground to consider the region as a separate geopolitical, economic, social and cultural macroregion. The article concentrates on the analysis of key results and achievements of Swedish chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (October 19, 2017 — October 3, 2019), evaluating the current status and prospects for further international cooperation within the framework of the BEAR.

**Keywords:** Barents Euro-Arctic Region, Arctic, globalization, regionalization, integration, national chairmanship, regional chairmanship, international relations, foreign policy, subjects of the Russian Federation.

### Introduction

International cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR) has traditionally been of interest to experts, political scientists, and journalists. The mechanism of cross-border interaction that has developed in the Region is an example, within the framework of which the current trends in the development of international relations of the subjects of the Russian Federation and the foreign policy of our country are investigated.

Furthermore, the two-level nature of integration within the BEAR is of great interest: multi-lateral cooperation at the level of the BEAC — the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (“ministerial” level) and at the level of the BRC — Barents Regional Council (“provincial” level). Such interaction, based on the principle of rotation and continuity, is a vital system factor, a key characteristic that ensures the goals and objectives of BEAR, its participants.

An analysis of the current experience of the national/regional chairmanship of a particular member country/region of the Barents cooperation allows us to assess the prospects for further cooperation within the framework of the BEAR, to develop the necessary recommendations for government bodies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation on the effective implementation of international and foreign economic ties.

### Sweden is a BEAC Chair Country

The Barents Euro-Arctic region is an essential two-tier segment of international relations in the Arctic. In 1993, the main idea of the Barents cooperation was the development of an original form of ties in the European North. The end of the Cold War in the Arctic region created the pre-

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requisites for opening new ways for productive and mutually beneficial cooperation between Northern Europe and Russia [1, Heininen, p. 216].

However, as the researchers rightly note, the mechanisms of functioning of the BEAR are significantly more politicized than cooperation through traditional levers of socio-economic development, which are based on the equilibrium of the objective national interests of states and the need for business and personal communication of the population, as well as human interaction [2, Lukin Yu.F., p. 76].

Moreover, after the fall of the Iron Curtain and in connection with the intensification of globalization and regionalization processes, the geopolitics of the Arctic began to significantly influence the modern system of international relations and the foreign policy of key actors, thus becoming world geopolitics [3, Heininen, p. 171].

On October 19, 2017, in Arkhangelsk, the Kingdom of Sweden took on the chairmanship of the BEAC from the Russian Federation as part of the 16th ministerial session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.

When assessing the Russian chairmanship, it should be noted that in 2015–2017, our country focused on important areas of cooperation, such as transport, the environment, climate, culture, and tourism. The Russian Chairmanship of the BEAC coincided with the controversial situation in the international relations. The Ukrainian crisis and continued sanction pressure on our country, incl. the Arctic region, largely determined the conditions for cross-border cooperation.

The main practical achievements of the national chairmanship of the Russian Federation of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council were the introduction of a visa-free regime for residents of border areas for up to 90 days within the 30 km zone on both sides; the establishment in 2016 of a 72-hour visa-free regime for passengers of cruise liners arriving at the ports of Arkhangelsk and Murmansk; the launch of direct railway communication on the route Petrozavodsk (Republic of Karelia) — Kuopio (Finland).

One of the key promising areas of cooperation completing the Russian chairmanship was and remained the construction of the Arkhangelsk-Syktvykar-Perm railway line under the Belkomur project. The start of the project, according to the author, should be a visible tool for the comprehensive development of the Russian territories of the BEAR. The Belkomur project stays in line with the economic interests of our country, will contribute to the logistical integration of the Arkhangelsk and Murmansk Oblasts, the Komi Republic with the regions of the Urals and Siberia, as well as the use of rational routes of cross-border railway arteries, the revival of the Northern Sea Route, and the implementation of the construction project the deep-water region of the seaport of Arkhangelsk and, ultimately, the commercial and industrial integration of the Russian Federation and the countries of Northern Europe.

The implementation of the Belkomur project will be a decisive impetus for social development for the Russian North, Urals, and Siberia. It will provide a quicker and less costly delivery of

resources from remote areas of the country to the markets. Also, it will create conditions for opening industrial production attractive to Scandinavian investors along the transport arteries.

When speaking on the chairmanship, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden Margot Wallström noted that during the two-year leadership of the BEAC, official Stockholm would be guided along with the principles of sustainable development and respect for human rights. It was planned to pay special attention to expanding contacts between residents of the macroregion, esp. to youth cooperation<sup>1</sup>.

In the official addresses of the Swedish Foreign Ministry, theses related to gender equality for residents and the creation of equal conditions for both sexes in the work of BEAR structures were also mentioned<sup>2</sup>.

During a press conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Norway, Finland, and Sweden in Arkhangelsk, completing the Council's leadership, Sergey Lavrov, emphasized the importance of practical work, calling the BEAC the primary integration mechanism in the northern part of Europe. He supported his Swedish colleague on the need for developing contacts between youth representatives, emphasizing the interest of our country in creating the BEAR youth forum. The Russian minister also noted foreign partners responded positively to Moscow's initiative to create the Barents Davos to exchange views and develop a meaningful position on BEAC activities.

The participants of the XVI ministerial session praised the positive changes in the development of contacts at various levels of the Barents cooperation. They confirmed their interest in maintaining their intensity in the future. The key issues on the agenda of the BEAC session were the development of transport and logistics infrastructure, environmental protection, support for indigenous peoples, drawing attention to BEAR as an attractive center of international tourism.

The Governor of the Arkhangelsk Oblast Igor Orlov, as the head of the host region, addressed a welcoming speech to the foreign ministers. The Governor noted the foundation for the further development of multilateral cooperation in the BEAR could be the transition to a common scientific space and partnership in higher education issues and Arctic research. He emphasized that the Government of the Arkhangelsk Oblast was convinced to see the key reference points in the Barents cooperation in business contacts and unlocking investment potential. Igor Orlov said that the Barents regional cooperation was harmoniously combined with the entire multifaceted system of international cooperation in the Arctic. He reminded these topics discussed at the 4th

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<sup>1</sup> Sergey Lavrov: «Arkhangel'sk — horoshaya ploshhadka dlya mezhdunarodnogo sotrudnichestva». Press-tsentr Pravitel'stva Arhangel'skoy oblasti [Sergey Lavrov: "Arkhangelsk is a good platform for international cooperation." Press Center of the Government of the Arkhangelsk Oblast]. URL: <http://dvinanews.ru/-7rp4d2yz> (accessed 08 November 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Swedish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council 2017-2019: Regional Sustainable Development for the Future. Swedish Foreign Policy Stories. Ministry for Foreign Affairs. URL: <http://www.swemfa.se/2017/10/20/swedish-chairmanship-of-the-barents-euro-arctic-council-2017-2019-regional-sustainable-development-for-the-future> (accessed 08 November 2019).

International Arctic Forum “Arctic: Territory of Dialogue” held in Arkhangelsk on March 29–30, 2017<sup>3</sup>.

“Barents cooperation is on the rise. Its history is a success story. The main thing is the political climate determined not by the polar breathing of relapses of suspicion and fear of the Cold War, but by the warm Gulf Stream of the Barents Process, which, along with state interests, is primarily focused on the interests of ordinary northerners: and Russians, and Norwegians, and Sami, and Finns, and Swedes, and many other ethnic groups” [4, Fokin Yu.E., Smirnov A.I., p. 72].

However, on some issues, suspicion between countries remains. A particular resonance at a press conference of foreign ministers on October 19, 2017, was caused by questions from Norwegian journalists about the growing strife between Russia and Norway because of the Svalbard; the residents of the region are concerned about the “growth of the military activity of the Russian Federation in the Arctic”<sup>4</sup>.

Sergey Lavrov replied that the Russian Foreign Ministry had questions for the Norwegian side regarding Svalbard. He drew attention to the fact that the diplomatic notes of the Russian Federation were ignored by the Oslo officials and noted that such rhetoric did not correspond to the spirit of northern cooperation. Regarding the “growth in military activity,” Minister Lavrov proposed comparing the military budgets of Russia and the European countries participating in the North Atlantic Alliance before accusing Moscow of militarizing the Arctic. The Minister also mentioned the recent NATO exercises Aurora-2017, which were held jointly with Sweden, a military-neutral state, but actively cooperating with Brussels. From the Minister’s point of view, the above indicates the implementation of the planned foreign policy line aimed at containing Russia.

The outgoing Norwegian Foreign Minister Børge Brende stated that his country “adhered to every point” of the Svalbard Treaty (1920), emphasized the Scandinavian partners’ desire to make Svalbard the most managed archipelago in the Arctic. Minister Lavrov, in turn, expressed the hope that the successor of Mr. Brende would find the opportunity to observe diplomatic rules and send Moscow an official answer to concrete questions.

Margot Wallström emphasized the Aurora-2017 joint exercises with NATO related to strengthening the defense capability of Sweden. She assured in Stockholm’s interest in maintaining peace and stability in the BEAR and maintaining the non-aligned status of her country.

The Swedish chairmanship of the BEAC ended on October 3, 2019, in Umeå (Westerbotten County, Sweden) at the 17th BEAC Ministerial Session.

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<sup>3</sup> Vystuplenie Gubernatora Arhangel'skoy oblasti I.A. Orlova na Plenarnom zasedanii XVI Ministerskoy sessii SBER. Ofitsial'nyy sayt Pravitel'stva Arhangel'skoy oblasti [Speech of the Governor of the Arkhangelsk Oblast Orlov I.A. at the Plenary Session of the 16th Ministerial Session of BEAC. Official website of the Government of the Arkhangelsk Oblast]. URL: <https://dvinaland.ru/news/578690> (accessed 08 November 2019).

<sup>4</sup> The author was involved in the information-analytical and organizational and protocol support of the official events on October 16–19, 2017 in Arkhangelsk.

That day, summing up the two-year Swedish chairmanship, the Council declaratively noted the following points <sup>5</sup>:

- the important role of the Barents cooperation as a platform for strengthening mutual trust and stability, respect for human rights, democratic values and gender equality, promoting sustainable development following the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development <sup>6</sup>;
- effective interaction at the national, regional and local levels, including contacts between people in which indigenous peoples play an important role as a key element of the Barents cooperation;
- significant development of the region since the foundation of cooperation in 1993;
- the need to continue working together to improve the well-being of BEAR residents;
- the decisive role of the Barents Regional Council and its regional program for 2019–2023;
- the significance of the parliamentary dimension took note of the decision of the IX Parliamentary Conference of the Barents Region, held in 2019 in Haparanda (Sweden);
- the importance of supporting indigenous peoples reaffirmed its commitment to respect for their rights outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) <sup>7</sup>, and also noted the results of the IV Congress of the Indigenous Peoples of the Barents Region and the 2nd Summit of the Indigenous Peoples of the Barents Region, held in 2019 in the town of Lycksele (Sweden) <sup>8</sup>;
- significant achievements in the fields of trade and economic cooperation, environmental protection, civil defense, and emergencies, health care, tourism, the timber industry, science, and education, as well as cultural exchange;
- the importance of the Barents region scholarship for the development of cultural cooperation;
- development of a permanent effective international transport connection supported the final draft of the Joint Barents Transport Plan;
- the importance of work to expand youth participation in all areas of cooperation, and also approved recommendations on youth policy; supported further monitoring of the implementation of activities in all areas of multilateral cooperation;
- the need to take urgent measures to combat the negative effects of climate change, reaffirmed its commitment to the implementation of the Paris Agreement (2015) and emphasized the need for active concerted action in this direction, based on the latest scientific research; the Council noted with concern that warming in the Barents region is more than double the average in the world, which could seriously affect indigenous eco-

<sup>5</sup> Barents Euro-Arctic Council Umeå Declaration, 3 October 2019, Umeå, Sweden. General Information Portal to the Barents Region. URL: <https://www.barentsinfo.fi/beac/docs/UmeoDeclaration.pdf> (accessed 09 November 2019).

<sup>6</sup> The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Text in Russian United Nations System Staff College. URL: [https://www.unssc.org/sites/unssc.org/files/2030\\_agenda\\_for\\_sustainable\\_development\\_-\\_primer\\_russian.pdf](https://www.unssc.org/sites/unssc.org/files/2030_agenda_for_sustainable_development_-_primer_russian.pdf) (accessed 09 November 2019).

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Adopted by resolution 61/295 of the UN General Assembly of 13 September 2007. Text in Russian. UN official website. URL: [https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl\\_conv/declarations/indigenous\\_rights.shtml](https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/declarations/indigenous_rights.shtml) (accessed 09 November 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Barents Indigenous Peoples Congress and Summit. Norwegian Barents Secretariat Official Website. URL: <https://barents.no/en/news/2019/barents-indigenous-peoples-congress-and-summit> (accessed 09 November 2019).

systems and livelihoods; the Council emphasized the need for continued active work by the BEAR working groups to implement the Climate Change Action Plan<sup>9</sup>;

- progress in reducing the number of environmental “hot spots” in the Barents region and encouraged participants to continue to work to improve environmental performance and intensify efforts to eliminate remaining ones;
- the importance of raising awareness of the Barents cooperation;
- its support for a political dialogue based on practical cooperation and contacts between people, which should remain a key factor in the development of cooperation within the BEAR framework, emphasized the importance of BEAC remaining a means of strengthening mutual trust, mutual understanding, and good neighborly relations.

The participants of the 17th Ministerial session of the BEAC expressed their gratitude to the Chair Country of the BEAC – Sweden and the Chair Territory of the BRS – the Norwegian province of Finnmark. National Chairmanship for the period 2019–2021 passed to Norway, regional — to the Swedish region of Westerbotten. The main event of the humanitarian sphere was the presentation of the Barents scholarship. The representative of the Arkhangelsk Oblast, Ilya Kuzubov, the inspirer and creator of the Taibola annual open-air cultural and environmental attracting thousands of participants, became the laureate from the Russian Federation.

Commenting on the results of the Swedish Chairmanship of the BEAC, the recently assumed office of Swedish Foreign Minister Anne Linde noted that the Stockholm officials were particularly pleased with the work on environmental issues and climate change. The Minister also drew the attention of the session participants to the fact that Sweden, was taking a leading role in promoting feminism in the international arena, sought to apply a feminist approach in foreign policy and during its chairmanship in the BEAC: “The development of feminism helps to strengthen certain structures, allows rethinking how these structures work, who they represent, and who will represent who in the future. It is imperative that women have the same opportunities as men”<sup>10</sup>.

One of the main priorities of the Swedish Chairmanship was to draw attention to the problems of youth and to enhance the participation of youth in the Barents cooperation. Anne Linde emphasized that in 2017–2019, young people were involved in ongoing work with ministers: they prepared a declaration supported by the BEAC.

The 17th Ministerial Session of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council did not include two key representatives — Sergey Lavrov and Pekka Haavisto. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and his Finnish colleague did not participate in the BEAC session (unlike the previous meeting in Arkhangelsk in 2017), which was a noticeable loss and made this important event less representative.

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<sup>9</sup> Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Co-operation. Barents Euro-Arctic Council official website. URL: <https://www.barentscooperation.org/en/About/Learn-More/Climate-Change-and-the-Barents-region/Barents-Action-Plan> (accessed 09 November 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Acting Barents, Thinking Arctic: Maximizing Attention to the North through Regional Cooperation. High North News. URL: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/acting-barents-thinking-arctic-maximizing-attention-north-through-regional-cooperation> (accessed 09 November 2019).

### *Global Agenda*

The well-known expression “Think globally, act locally” can be applied to the Barents cooperation. An iconic feature that completed the Swedish chairmanship at the 17th BEAC Ministerial Session – it was organized on the sidelines of the European Union's Arctic Forum. And thus, the BEAC Ministerial Meeting was only an addition to the much larger event of the EU.

On October 3–4, 2019, a special EU Arctic Forum was organized by the European Commission, the European Foreign Service, and the Government of Sweden. The panel discussions of the forum brought together about five hundred people, incl. the Foreign Ministers of Italy, India, Finland, Latvia, Norway, Malta, and European Commissioners (Federica Mogherini and Karmenu Vella). One of the meetings of the forum was visited by the heiress of the Swedish throne, Crown Princess Victoria.

The purpose of the EU forum in 2019 was to discuss international relations in the Arctic, ecology and climate change, investment cooperation, the Internet and communications. According to the organizers, the forum was supposed to form a common political position, a strategic view of the EU countries on cooperation in the Arctic after 2020. At the same time, the Swedish Government emphasized Stockholm's long-standing commitment to the EU Arctic policy.

As a result of the work of the EU Arctic Forum in Umeå, high representatives of the European Union and the Swedish Foreign Ministry issued a joint statement (declaration). The main theses were the following <sup>11</sup>.

To protect the environment and support sustainable economic development, the EU will help the region in three key areas:

- investing in research and development;
- protection of local ecosystems and biodiversity;
- creation of developed infrastructure for connecting the region with the rest of Europe, incl. high-speed access to the Internet.

The declaration also noted that on these issues, the European Union would maintain active interaction with central, regional and municipal authorities in the European part of the Arctic.

Three countries participating in the EU (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) and two countries participating in the European Economic Area (Iceland and Norway) are Arctic states. Therefore, the decisive role of the EU in the Arctic is proclaimed in the joint statement: interest in keeping the region as a zone of “low tension” but “high cooperation”. That is, the document is about promoting the constant commercial, industrial, and investment development of the Arctic region, based on relevant scientific research. The emphasis in this case, according to the authors of the statement, will be on preserving fragile ecosystems, as well as considering the living conditions of local communities, esp. indigenous peoples.

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<sup>11</sup> Sovmestnoe zayavlenie: davnyaya priverzhennost' ES ukrepliyu ustoychivogo mezhdunarodnogo sotrudnichestva v Arktike [Joint statement: the EU long-standing commitment to strengthen sustainable international cooperation in the Arctic.]. European Union External Action: Official Website. URL: [https://eeas.europa.eu/ru/eu-information-russian/68417/совместное-заявление-давняя-приверженность-ес-укреплению-устойчивого-международного\\_ru](https://eeas.europa.eu/ru/eu-information-russian/68417/совместное-заявление-давняя-приверженность-ес-укреплению-устойчивого-международного_ru) (accessed 15 November 2019).

According to the joint declaration, the EU sets itself specific tasks to protect the environment: to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, and by 2050 become a carbon-neutral economy.

It is noteworthy that representatives of the Russian Federation were not invited to the Arctic Forum of the EU. Our country was not mentioned in the final declaration approved by the European Commission and the Swedish Foreign Ministry — a joint statement.

We regret to note that the growing interest of Brussels in the polar macroregion leaves BEAR on the second place. Nordic countries are becoming increasingly involved in the EU Arctic policy. BEAC today is an interstate platform with a routine work agenda, and the EU Arctic Forum is a major event with a large number of participants, in which real prospects for the development of the northern territories on a global scale are discussed (serious competition to the forum, the author's opinion is only the Arctic Council).

At the same time, the term “Arctic Europe” defended by the European Union includes only administrative-territorial units of the north of Norway, Finland, and Sweden, as well as Iceland and Danish autonomy — Greenland. Thus, the Brussels officials ignore the need to reckon with the national interests of our country in northern Europe, retains anti-Russian sanctions, which leads to an increase in political contradictions in world geopolitics. It is also noteworthy that the EU's entry into the Arctic Council as an observer will become possible only after the rescinding of financial and economic restrictions directed against Russia, which, in turn, will continue to veto the application of the European Union for permanent status in the Arctic Council.

According to the level and number of participants in the EU Arctic Forum, its agenda, we can conclude that the key official event of the leading subregional organization in the European North (BEAC) [5, p. 112] remained in the shadow of this larger international event.

### ***Regional Agenda***

In October 2017, in parallel with the acquisition of Sweden's National Chairmanship, the Norwegian province of Finnmark took over the leadership of the Finnish region as part of the rotation procedures at the regional level. The meeting of the Barents Regional Council also took place in Arkhangelsk<sup>12</sup>.

The province of Finnmark, for the first time, assumed the chairmanship of the BRS. Governor Ragnhild Wasswick then presented priority directions for the upcoming biennial chairmanship: continuity, economic development, environmental protection, development of transport infrastructure, cooperation between people, and lowering border barriers<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Barentsevo sotrudnichestvo: konsolidatsiya znaniy, resursov i vozmozhnostey. V pravitel'stve oblasti sostoyalos' zasedanie Barentseva Regional'nogo Soveta. Press-tsentr Pravitel'stva Arkhangel'skoy oblasti [Barents cooperation: consolidation of knowledge, resources, and opportunities. The Government of the Oblast held a meeting of the Barents Regional Council. Press center of the Government of the Arkhangelsk Oblast]. URL: <http://dvinanews.ru/c6freewu> (accessed 09 November 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Møte i Barents regionråd og ministerråd. Finnmark fylkeskommune. URL: <https://www.ffk.no/aktuelt/mote-i-barents-regionrad-og-ministerrad.590687.aspx> (accessed 09 November 2019).



Between October 2017 and October 2019, the following documents were adopted<sup>14</sup>:

- Joint statement of the BRS members of May 24, 2018 (Rovaniemi, Finland);
- Joint statement of the BRS members of September 27, 2018 (Syktyvkar, Russia);
- Protocol of the BRS meeting of April 3, 2019 (Tromsø, Norway);
- Joint Statement of the BRS Members of October 2, 2019 (Umeå, Sweden).

On October 2, 2019, on the eve of the 17th Ministerial Session of BEAC opening, the main BEAR event at the "provincial" level was held, i.e., the BRC meeting, dedicated to summing up the chairmanship of the Finnmark and the transition of the leadership to the Swedish province of Westernbotten. The focus was on the proposals of the BRS to the ministers of foreign affairs related to the creation of a financial support mechanism for working groups. Among other issues, visa facilitation, environmental protection, and climate change, youth cooperation, and the activities of the Barents Regional Youth Council, development of transport infrastructure, support for indigenous peoples, and a regional outlook on the Arctic agenda were also discussed<sup>15</sup>.

One of the notable at the BRC meeting was the appeal of the First Deputy Governor – Chair of the Government of the Arkhangelsk Oblast Alexey Alsufyev to the participants, who confirmed that the Arkhangelsk Oblast considered scientific cooperation as a key issue of work within the BEAR framework<sup>16</sup>.

The representative of the Arkhangelsk Oblast also noted that following the decision of President Vladimir Putin, a world-class scientific and educational center would be created in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation. Its goal should be to support the comprehensive development of the Russian Arctic. It is planned that the center will solve the problems of studying and promoting innovative technologies, developing human resources for the research, commercial, industrial, and investment development of the Arctic. Alexey Alsufyev invited BEAR partners to work together in the scientific and educational center to search for constructive solutions to pressing problems in the Russian Arctic that could become mutually beneficial.

Of course, the creation of such a scientific and educational center with the involvement of foreign partners in the BEAR could create real prerequisites for meaningful cooperation between industrial enterprises and higher educational institutions of the Arctic states.

### **Conclusion**

At the initial stage of the development of the Barents cooperation, the ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Kingdom of Norway (1995–1997) Yuriy Fokin briefly described the main

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<sup>14</sup> Meeting Protocols and Joint Statements of the Barents Regional Council. Finnmark Chairmanship 2017-2019. Barents Euro-Arctic Council official website. URL: <https://www.barentscooperation.org/en/Barents-Regional-Council/Regional-Council-documents/Regional-Council-documents> (accessed 09 November 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Joint Statement of the Barents Regional Council on the Occasion of the BEAC Ministerial Meeting and the EU Arctic Forum. 3 October 2019, Umeå, Sweden. General Information Portal to the Barents Region. URL: [https://www.barentsinfo.fi/beac/docs/JointStatementofBRC\\_02102019.pdf](https://www.barentsinfo.fi/beac/docs/JointStatementofBRC_02102019.pdf) (accessed 09 November 2019).

<sup>16</sup> V Umeo prokhorit zasedanie Barentseva regional'nogo soveta. Press-tsentr Pravitel'stva Arkhangel'skoy oblasti [Umeå hosts a meeting of the Barents Regional Council. Press center of the Government of the Arkhangelsk Oblast]. URL: <http://dvinanews.ru/-5uaes8br> (accessed 09 November 2019).

obstacle to the successful development of Russian-Norwegian relations — this is the legacy inherited from the Cold War: fear, mistrust, suspicion [6, Smirnov A.I., p. 268].

And it is regrettable to note that the anti-Russian sanctions introduced after the events of the Ukrainian crisis return the rhetoric of some participants of the Barents cooperation to the period of history before the “Murmansk Initiatives” of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev, negatively affect the development of cooperation within the framework of the BEAR. An example here is the peculiar “diplomatic demarche” of the head of the foreign ministry of one of the BEAC member countries, who on March 30, 2017, demonstratively left the plenary session of the IV International Arctic Forum “Arctic — Territory of Dialogue”, when President of the Russian Federation started his speech <sup>17</sup>.

More than a quarter of a century, along with the positive nature of investments in small and medium projects, we observed a tendency for foreign partners in the Barents cooperation to move away from investing in large-scale projects, the implementation of which could enrich international cooperation in the region, raising the status of BEAC on the world stage. What is more important for the subjects of the Russian Federation, this would significantly increase the level of socio-economic development of the Russian territories of the BEAR. Undoubtedly, this seems to be beneficial for foreign colleagues as well. E.g., as the head of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat Lars Georg Fordal points out, already now in the border town of Kirkenes (Finnmark, Norway), 30% of goods have been purchased by citizens of the Russian Federation. According to the secretariat’s report for 2018, the municipality of Sør-Varanger “earns billions” on trade and economic cooperation with Russia <sup>18</sup>.

The Swedish government builds its foreign policy in the Arctic macro-region on the country’s membership in the Arctic Council, BEAC, the Northern Dimension, the Nordic Council of Ministers, and other international forums. Sweden is focusing on active participation in their events [7]. At the same time, Stockholm officials point country’s long-standing commitment to the EU Arctic policy proved by the EU Special Arctic Forum (Umeå October 3–4, 2019), which overshadowed the 17th Ministerial session of the BEAC.

Thus, the two-year Swedish Chairmanship of the BEAC was not marked by a transition to the harmonious development of Barents cooperation. In essence, the humanitarian sphere still “overshadows” economics, some political contradictions have not been overcome (e.g., the positions of Norway and the USA on Russian presence on Svalbard [8, Pedersen T.]).

The relatively low commodity turnover between the Russian and foreign parts of the BEAR also speaks in favor of the latter arguments. E.g., the Arkhangelsk Oblast is the largest administrative-territorial entity in the BEAR, and the town of Arkhangelsk, with a population of 350 thousand

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<sup>17</sup> The author was involved in the information-analytical, organizational and protocol support of the official events held in Arkhangelsk on 29-31 March 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Lars Georg Fordal. Felles historie, felles framtid. Vi trenger en åpnere grense mot Russland. Det vil begge land tjene på. Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK). URL: [https://www.nrk.no/ytring/felles-historie\\_-felles-framtid-1.14753633](https://www.nrk.no/ytring/felles-historie_-felles-framtid-1.14753633) (accessed 09 November 2019) (дата обращения: 21.11.2019).

people, is the largest in the Barents region. Moreover, according to the official data of the key state institution for supporting non-primary exports — the Russian Export Center Joint-Stock Company for 2018, neither Norway, Finland nor Sweden were among the top ten countries for exporting goods from the Arkhangelsk Oblast [9].

From the author's point of view, the decisive factor in the Barents cooperation today should remain trade and economic interaction and the BEAR investment potential: an increase in the number of Kolarctic projects and their financing, expansion of scientific and technical cooperation in the Arctic, creation of joint industrial production, more efficient development of transport and logistics infrastructure and cross-border economic ties.

Open borders strengthen the economy and foster business contacts. Therefore, the creation of a simplified visa regime and customs procedures between the foreign part of the BEAR and the North-West Federal District of the Russian Federation should become an obvious priority. It is so, first, for the Barents Regional Council and the Regional Committee members, who could subsequently convince central governments of their countries.

And only through the joint efforts of the BEAC and BRS members and the political will of the leaders it could be possible to implement a large number of specific large-scale projects of scientific, technical, trade, economic and investment cooperation that are in demand in the BEAR territories. The result of joint work will be meeting the public needs of the population, improving the quality of life in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, which are participants in the Barents cooperation (the Republic of Karelia, the Komi Republic, the Arkhangelsk Oblast, the Murmansk Oblast, and the Nenets Autonomous Okrug).

Moreover, in the current conditions of market relations, the Barents cooperation cannot develop on a directive policy. Of course, the political elites and residents of the northern territories should be clear on the feasibility of such integration.

Only when implementing an optimistic scenario and overcoming political prejudices and mistrust in the medium and long term, the central task of international cooperation in the Barents region could and should be the formation of a free trade zone and a common market for goods, creation of joint industries, and an increase in mutual investments. With the development of favorable conditions, it will even become possible to speak about the development of elements of the BEAR customs union.

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