



## Japanese-Russian seminar on cooperation in the North and the Arctic: is the Barents region a starting point of cooperation in the Arctic?

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CONFERENCE REPORT



## Japanese-Russian seminar on cooperation in the North and the Arctic: is the Barents region a starting point of cooperation in the Arctic?

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On 9 June 2021, an international Japanese-Russian seminar on cooperation in the Arctic was held on the Zoom platform. The seminar was organised by the Center for Arctic Research and the International Department of Hokkaido University. Supported by the Arctic Challenge for Sustainability II (2020–2025) grant programme, the Training Platform for Japanese-Russian Economic Cooperation and Humanitarian Exchanges (HaRP, 2017–2022), and the UArctic Thematic Network on Asia in the Arctic. The first speaker was Geir Hønneland, Norwegian research professor at the University of Arctic Tromsø (UiT) and a member of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. He presented his research on the topic ‘Norway and Russia in the Barents Region: the structure of bilateral and multilateral cooperation’. Hønneland spoke to Norway’s aspirations in the Arctic region and outlined Oslo’s strategy for implementing cooperation programmes with Russia. The main emphasis of the report covered the factors which form the basis of suspicion from Russia in the context of Arctic cooperation. Among them:

- Scientific advice is ‘rigged’
- Politically motivated regulations and arrests
- Svalbard Environmental Act initiated by NATO
- The 2010 delimitation line in the Barents Sea is not nationally appealing

According to Hønneland, the Russians believe that ‘the world is out to get them’ and Moscow increasingly views the international political situation as a zero-sum game. This tendency is further aggravated by the existing long-standing negative images Russia and Europe have of each other.

Hønneland also stressed that Russia follows international law and other generally accepted norms, which forms an environment of ‘Russian pragmatism’, and which pushes Moscow towards some compromises with other states in the Arctic. Examples cited include:

- Constant negotiation of quotas (in terms of production)
- Careful harmonisation of technical regulations
- Joint introduction of new regulatory measures
- Delimitation of borders

Overall, Hønneland described Russia's cooperation in the Arctic as stable and focused. He emphasises the realistic approach of the Russian authorities in the context of joint management, but at the same time notes their readiness for a compromise solution of common issues.

The second speaker was a Russian researcher from the Luzin Institute For Economic Studies of the Kola Science Center of the Russia Academy of Science – Larissa Riabova. Riabova shared the results of her research on into 'Studying the Barents Region: Views and Experience from the Russian Side'. Within the framework of the report, the problems, and prospects of the Barents region from the beginning of the 1990s to the present were canvassed. Riabova noted there was a period of preconditions and emergence of cooperation which can be traced to 1992-1993, then came a period of formation from the early 2000s right up to the current period of development today. Special attention was paid to the process of implementing concrete programs in the region – here financing and regulatory mechanisms were noted. In particular, focus was paid to the INTERREG programs within the framework of which projects in the border zone were financed. Here, discussion focused on socio-economic processes and the impact of Norwegian-Russian cooperation in the fishing villages of Teriberka (Russia) and Bostfjord (Norway) in the border area over the past 20 years. Riabova noted that although there is a strong educational basis in the Barents Region, current knowledge about the region is fragmented, limited and partial. In her opinion, a systematic knowledge of the region, especially of the long-term impact of the Barents cooperation, is necessary for full-fledged and high-quality management. Also, it was noted the need for even greater involvement of municipalities, districts, communes in the processes of cooperation. In concluding remarks, Riabova noted the current state of cooperation in the Barents Region needs a new impetus for the full and sustainable realisation of the region's potential.

The final speaker was a representative of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials – Gøril Johansen. Johansen thanked the speakers for their interest in the Arctic in general and to Barents cooperation in particular. She noted that Norway is chairing the Barents Council for 2019–2021 and provided a short overview of ongoing projects in the region. Johansen cited the importance of cooperation in BEAR, not only because of the uniqueness of flora, fauna and other natural resources, but also because the region is home to more than 5 million people. Discussion then followed between participants of the forum, ranging from the following topics:

- The Barents Cooperation played a pioneering role in the early years after the end of the Cold War, but what about its current state and prospects?
- How is Arctic and Barents cooperation related?
- What is the secret of the main problems and successes of the Barents cooperation?
- What other initiatives aimed at developing interregional cooperation (in the context of the Arctic and the High North) can be successful in the Barents Region?
- Could the best practices of Barents cooperation be a good example or lesson for regional cooperation in Northeast Asia or throughout Asia in general?

The organisers from the Hokkaido University showed a high degree of preparation. I would like to express my gratitude to Nadezhda Kharlampyeva for the opportunity to participate in this event.