

**Keynote Speech: Heidi HAUTALA, Vice President of the European Parliament, 10-15 mins**

Ambassador,  
Conference participants,

*I want to thank the Barents Euro-Arctic Council for inviting the European Parliament to this conference.*

*It is a pleasure and an honour for me, as a Finnish Vice President of the European Parliament, to represent the parliament here.*

*The Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the European Union have a lot in common. They both are born out of cooperation. They both seek solutions wherever and whenever the countries can achieve more together than by working on their own.*

*The European Parliament pays close attention to the Arctic and also recognizes the role of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in its resolutions. The latest is 22 pages long and was adopted in October last year. The message is clear: The European Parliament calls for more Arctic in the EU, and more EU in the Arctic.*

*The Barents Euro-Arctic Council has played an important role in building trust and mutual understanding in the North while enhancing the cooperation between Arctic countries. The European Parliament stresses that the EU must continue contributing to enhanced Arctic multilateral governance and even increase its activity in the region. The Barents Euro-Arctic Council has proved out to be a very successful model for sectoral cooperation between local and national state and non-state actors. The cooperation does not always have to go through capitals. It often works better when done on a local and regional level.*

*Life in the Arctic and in the EU's northernmost regions is different than in the rest of the EU. It should be taken into account in the EU policies: The European Parliament concluded that the EU should include the Arctic dimension to its sectoral policies whenever it is appropriate.*

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*Whole Europe and also the Barents region is surrounded by all kinds of challenges. It is most unfortunate that now, due to Russia's unprovoked, full scale aggression against Ukraine, and due to the consequent Western sanctions, the work with Russia has been brought to a halt. It is, however, not possible to ignore the huge role and responsibility of Russia in the Arctic cross-border cooperation.*

*During the Cold War the Barents region was an area of military tensions. The Barents Euro-Arctic Council was based on the principle that close cooperation between people reduces these tensions and secure political long-term stability. For a long time it was thought that this objective had been successfully achieved, and for a long time it perhaps was so.*

*Now we are in a new situation. Tensions are on the rise again and at the moment it is very difficult to imagine cooperation with the Russian administration, but at the same time it is important that we do not lose the sense of unity and contacts among the people of the region. I have personally been on Russia's black list already for seven years, unable to travel to Russia even though I would have*

liked to.

*We should also be mindful of the importance of the work of Russian civil society and independent media to the whole of the Barents region. Last week in Riga, Latvia, I met representatives of Russian independent media outlets, Novaja Gazeta and Meduza, who have relocated to the EU countries. Similarly, it would be crucial to find ways to continue to support those living in the Barents region. Their reporting has made a big contribution to the awareness of the challenges the region faces.*

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*This conference aims at creating the Green Transition strategy for the region, now necessarily focusing on the Nordic member states and their entities. All three priorities of the Finnish chairmanship fit very well to this task: sustainable development and healthy environment, people-to-people contacts and transport and logistics.*

*These are excellent priorities for these turbulent times: Sustainable development has been the overall objective of the Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation ever since the Council started its work, but now this cooperation is needed more than ever before.*

*I read the communication from the Lapland Chamber of Commerce with a great interest. The Chamber of Commerce announced its goal to make Lapland a Green Transition frontrunner, a global hub for sustainable use of natural resources and responsible economic growth. This is an ambitious and admirable goal that requires decisive actions.*

*Also the European Parliament has attached great attention to both opportunities and challenges surrounding sustainable development.*

*A lot of the opportunities are to be found in the excavation of minerals in order to satisfy the needs of new technologies in the green and digital transition. I would state that those needs and their impact has largely been underestimated. The Parliament holds that if managed sustainably, EU's autonomy could be strengthened. But there are always contradictions and tensions around the use of such strategic resources.*

*According to the European Parliament „the Arctic should play a central role in the European Raw Materials Alliance, boosting Europe's output of critical materials“. This could also cut the EU's dependence on China. The best answer to Sino-Russian cooperation is cooperation inside the EU.*

*I am happy to learn about the revitalised optimism on bringing international tourists back. Just yesterday I read from the Financial Times that „the Swedish Lapland is known for having the clearest skies and best star-spotting in Scandinavia, and is home to multiple sky stations... it's a magical place – not to mention an up-and-comer on the global food scene...“. Culinary pleasures and tree hotels.*

*The people in the north have always understood the value of cross-border cooperation and synergies. Positive developments and investments in northern Sweden or Norway create opportunities also in northern Finland and vice versa. The people of Barents cooperate, not compete, with each other. This is surely the case? Surely I trust that both Norway and Finland have equally clear night skies and Northern lights.*

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*Dear participants,*

*The Green Transition is full of contradictions. Primarily, the conflicts of interest between mining activities and tourism still need to be settled. At times, active citizens must seek correction of decisions by permitting authorities in courts, even by appealing to the EU bodies. Therefore, I cannot overemphasise the importance of good, democratic and inclusive governance models.*

*The European Parliament has stated that decisions by local authorities on the excavation of minerals must be taken transparently. Similarly, presentations in the Petitions Committee of the European Parliament showed that all over Europe, environmental impact assessments by mining operators assessed by permitting authorities leave much room for public participation.*

*The European Parliament, in its long resolution on the Arctic, also reminds of the importance of adhering to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in all their business operations and relationships with the Arctic region, and to ensure effective human rights and environmental due diligence processes.*

*A key element of those principles is to ensure effective, meaningful and informed consultations at all stages with stakeholders. I found a good note on this in the Lapland Chamber of Commerce position paper which was just delivered to Helsinki: it mentions the growing importance of the social licence to operate, the acceptance granted to a company or organisation by the community.*

*It is not easy to combine interests of the industry on the one hand, and the interests of tourism on the other, but it is clear to me that all developments must benefit the local people and local communities, including indigenous people, and they must take into account the particularities of the beautiful, unique nature and environment here in the north.*

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*Achieving a true sustainable Green Transition requires resources, infrastructure and money.*

*The EP has called for an increase in the accessibility of digital infrastructure. It would not benefit only companies and economic operators, but all people. Digital infrastructure would enable better digital connectivity for Arctic communities as well as healthcare support, social services and online education. Well functioning digital infrastructure is a key to many kinds of services.*

*All activities also need funding. The EU has been a major financial contributor to Arctic research through programmes such as Horizon 2020, and the Parliament has stressed the need to increase EU funding for Arctic research and development, and also an ambitious investment plan, a special investment platform for the Arctic.*

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*My final point on the Green Transition is perhaps the most crucial of them all: We all know that the climate crisis endangers us all, but it is even more dangerous to the indigenous people. The Barents Region is home to the three indigenous peoples, the Sámi, the Nenets and the Vepsians.*

*Climate change but also technological transformation are affecting the traditional way of life of*

*indigenous peoples, even displacing them from their traditional habitation and culture. We have to turn this vicious circle and make the Green Transition work for the indigenous people, not against them. This means that all actions should have active involvement of the local communities and inhabitants of the Arctic. All legislation, all development projects that may affect the local people, should obtain indigenous people's free, prior and informed consent.*

*The European Parliament has also called all those EU member states, including Finland, who have not already done so, to ratify ILO Convention No 169 on Indigenous and Tribal people without delay.*

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*Dear participants,*

*The priorities of the Finnish Chairmanship and the topics of this conference are closely linked to the EU-wide and global strategic developments.*

*You may trust that your work has the backing of the European Parliament. I would like to act as an emissary between the European Parliament and yourselves. In fact, this task has been delegated to me by President Roberta Metsola.*

*With this words I wish you a very good conference!*

*Thank you.*

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