

A new strategy of the Northern Forum

On 11-12 April 2018, XIII General Assembly of the Northern Forum will convene in Krasnoyarsk, Russia. It is an international organization that brings together Arctic and Northern regions to improve the quality of life of peoples living in the North and to enhance the principles of Northern territories sustainable development.

The Northern Forum has a quite long and rich 26-year history of pioneering the regional international cooperation in Northern hemisphere. For several decades the Northern Forum has been successfully implementing initiatives and projects that benefit Northern and Arctic areas of the world, and has been effectively serving as a regional voice in a global arena on current Arctic agenda.

Biennial General Assembly gives an opportunity to assess Forum's work and to acknowledge achievements and successes made during last two-year period. Since XII General Assembly of the Northern Forum that was held in Yakutsk in November 2015, the Forum has significantly grown up thanks to all regions and organizations involved in implementation of its mission.

Among significant achievements of the past 2-year period it is worth noting Alaska's and Lapland's – one of the Northern Forum founders – membership restoration, as well as a number of Russian regions that joined the membership – Magadan Oblast, Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Primorsky Krai, Krasnoyarsk Krai, the latter assumed a chairmanship in 2015. Moreover, the Forum have established relationships with Arctic-related companies and organizations what resulted in increase of business partners and laid the groundwork for future joint projects and collaborations. The organizations that newly joined the business partnership – Arctic Portal, High North Center for Business and Governance at Nord University Business School, UIC Arctic Business Relations LLC, Energy Saving Technologies LLC, SuluS LLC and Smyk-Master LLC – complemented the work of the Northern Forum and continue making invaluable contribution to Northern priorities promotion.

Thanks to “fresh” players, especially Alaska and Lapland, the Russian team led by Krasnoyarsk Krai and Secretariat have started a joint work on Working groups' creation to address current pressing issues such as climate change, environment, energy, construction, transportation, business, culture, education and research, quality of life, healthcare etc. This is a crucial stage of reformation that created a foundation for real international cooperation in the Arctic. In that process it is important that interests of all members are equally considered.

Chairing region together with the Northern Forum Secretariat keep consistently working on attraction of Northern and Arctic regions and organizations to cooperation within the Northern Forum. Busan Metropolitan City, Heilongjiang Province, Greenland and a number of Norwegian and Russian regions are showing a great interest in the work and perspectives of the organization. At the upcoming Assembly accession of new members is expected.

Lately when certain difficulties have emerged in the big politics, it is the regions who can take a responsibility for preserving a stability in the North. Such flurry of activity around the Northern Forum, such actions undertaken at the regional level by both politicians and business representatives, civil society, are understandable. North residents perfectly understand the fragility of their common Arctic home. It is critical here to sustain peace and stability, avoid confrontation among countries, prevent politicization and military scenarios.

It is constantly addressed by officials and leading experts in the Arctic Council. It is also addressed in the Northern Forum plans for further development. The Northern Forum as an Observer to the Arctic Council effectively includes a regional component on international agenda of an intergovernmental forum. The organization takes an active part in all Arctic Council events and its Working groups' activities. In 2016 the Northern Forum successfully maintained its status in the Arctic Council what essentially proves the importance of international regional cooperation in the Arctic and significant role of the Northern Forum for regional dimension.

Indeed, the Northern Forum delegations consisted of citizens of different nations have begun getting actively involved in the work of the Arctic Council. During US Chairmanship and now Finnish Chairmanship in the Arctic Council, the Northern Forum representatives took part in the work of such Arctic Council Working groups as SDWG, CAFF and PAME. They have included on the Arctic Council agenda a number of projects focused on sustainable development, environment and indigenous interests.

Krasnoyarsk Krai continued the reorganizational efforts undertaken by Sakha Republic (Yakutia) that led the Northern Forum from 2011 to 2015. Because of timely carried out reorganizational measures that enriched substantially the Forum's organizational structure, we have an opportunity to pursue the fundamental idea of the organization to provide a better future for Northern and Arctic regions, which are the essential partners, through joint efforts.

This period enabled the Northern Forum Secretariat, which was relocated in 2013 from Anchorage (US) to Yakutsk (Russia), to build an actual international synergy among Northern Forum member regions and did a great amount of successful work to take its profile to a new level while effectively representing the organization in the international arena.

Listed above and other achievements of the Northern Forum will be reviewed at the XIII General Assembly in Krasnoyarsk that will gather representatives of the Northern Forum member regions, business partners, experts and other Arctic and North stakeholders.

During the Assembly there will be the Northern Forum projects presentation, which are taking part in organization's Call for Projects. Based on Call's results that will conclude in the end of the year the chosen joint projects will receive the Northern Forum grant. Also, Board of the Governors and Regional Coordinators Committee will meet to discuss the work of the Northern Forum; it is planned to sign a cooperation agreement with Ugra State University, and Far Eastern Federal University, to award Walter Hickel medal to individuals that contributed to development of the Northern Forum and regions.

An important agenda item is a discussion of the Northern Forum strategy developed under the leadership of Lapland. It identifies the key development areas and strategical steps necessary for further strengthening of a regional voice.

Today it can be said that Krasnoyarsk Krai in cooperation with the Northern Forum member regions and Secretariat have effectively accomplished its task to develop interregional cooperation, to promote the most important initiatives, and also to build a constructive agenda of the Northern Forum cooperation for the benefit of peoples' well-being in the challenging Arctic settings.