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CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE ARCTIC REGION

THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE ARCTIC REGION

Report from the Secretary General

**The Eleventh Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians, Whitehorse 9-11 September 2014**

**General**

Whitehorse and the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre was a beautiful and functional venue for the 11th Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region. The topics on the agenda addressed some of the big challenges in the Arctic: sustainable infrastructure development, Arctic governance models and decision-making processes, economic development and competence building, and environmental challenges.

The structure of the conference was as follows:

Day 1: opening session and one agenda item

Day 2: three agenda items

Day 3: excursion

Because of the logistics connected to the excursion the structure of the conference in Whitehorse was a bit different than the previous Conferences. At earlier conferences the excursion has taken place after lunch on day 2.

For the participants with the biggest jet-lag a full day two inside in a conference centre is more difficult to overcome than the second day as half a day and excursion after lunch.

As in Akureyri the delegations engaged actively in the political debates on each agenda item. This conversation between the panellists and participants is important. The agenda had set aside enough time for this and the program provided for many opportunities for informal conversations and networking.

The last three parliamentary conferences have all taken place in the beginning of September. The last part of August and first part of September seems to work well for the member parliaments as a time for the Conference.

The organisation of the conference was excellent and a report from the Conference is being prepared by the Parliament of Canada.

At previous conferences the invitation has been sent in the spring time. For the conference in Whitehorse the invitations were sent out in the beginning of July. This may have limited the participation from those who are not familiar with the planning process in the Standing Committee, as for instance some observers.

**Conference agenda**

Agenda items

The Committee decided two have four main agenda items at the conference. This was also partly because of the structure at this conference with all agenda items on day one and two. The number of invited speakers on each topic was also fewer than at earlier conferences.

The main items on the agenda were:

* Sustainable Infrastructure Development
* Governance models and decision-making processes
* Enhancing Northern Economies: Responsible Resource Development and Capacity Building
* Environmental Challenges

Report

The work with the report Innovative Economic Development and Capacity Building as a part of the preparations for the Conference in Whitehorse worked well.

Speakers

The speakers represented the science community, parliaments, governments and the business sector. The speakers also reflected the different regions and countries in the Arctic. As expected the majority of presenters came from North-America. The gender balance was good. The variation in background is positive and gives the interventions and the following debates valuable perspectives.

For the next conference it might be an idea give a stronger focus on cooperation in the Arctic.

Rapporteurs

The Conference in Whitehorse was the second CPAR with rapporteurs from the Standing Committee on each main agenda item. The decision by the Standing Committee to appoint rapporteurs on the main topics functioned very well also in Whitehorse. The reports gave valuable political dimensions during the conference and input to the conference statement. Having the rapporteurs as speakers at the conference strengthened the parliamentary dimension in the conference and made the work and members of the Standing Committee more visible.

This way of working with rapporteurs in SCPAR should be continued in SCPAR’s future work and conferences.

**Conference participation**

Parliamentarians

Because of the process after the election the European Parliament had not yet formed a delegation and was unfortunately not able to attend the conference. However the parliaments of the eight Arctic states were represented.

The possibility to have up to 6 members in the respective delegations seems to work fine.

Government

The Arctic Council and Minister Aglukkaq had to cancel the participation at the Conference in the very last minute due to the discovery of a ship from the Franklin expedition. There were other representatives from the government of Canada but no one was able to present the work of the Arctic Council.

The biennial Arctic parliamentary conference is an important venue for more parliamentarians than the members of the Standing Committee to learn about the cooperation in the Arctic Council and engage in a dialogue with a representative of the Arctic Council.

Permanent Participants

The number of PPs attending the conference was lower than usual. The Saami Parliamentary Council did not attend, but the president of RAIPON did participate actively. There were also other guests with PP affiliations. The PPs should be encouraged to participate more at the conferences.

Observers and guests

The observers from other parliaments made valuable contributions in the conference. The number of observers has been relatively stable at the last conferences.

**Meeting with observers**

In advance of the conference the Standing Committee invited the observers participating at the conference to a meeting. After a short introduction by the Standing Committee the participating observers were given the opportunity to give short statements to introduce their work.

A possibility for a dialogue in a smaller forum is positive and this is a format which should continue and can be developed further, depending on the number of observers and who they represent.