

Foreword

More than twenty years have passed since the signing in 1993 of the so-called Kirkenes Declaration that established what has come to be known as the Barents Region. The Kirkenes Declaration heralded a new concept of regional collaboration that transcended national borders. The declaration outlined a specific organizational design intended to stimulate and initiate collaboration aimed at regional development, between the counties and regions in the northernmost territories of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the European parts of the Russian Federation.

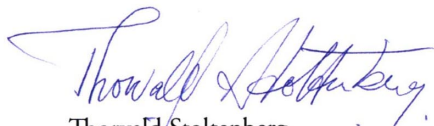
We note that in the first two decades of its existence, the initiative to establish the Barents Region has already produced many positive consequences. The dismantling of the Iron Curtain at the beginning of the 1990s, somewhat paradoxically left the people living in the area of the current Barents Region seemingly facing a more uncertain future. With the reduced military tension, it was to be expected that the rich natural resources in the area would trigger an intensified industrial exploitation by multinational corporations, which would not necessarily result in significant benefits for the regional population. At the same time, state support for infrastructure and social services would presumably be difficult to maintain at their previous levels once military establishments could no longer employ the same numbers of personnel as before. In short, the very positive opportunities offered by the dismantling of the Iron Curtain simultaneously seemed to mean an increased need for regional support that would strain national state budgets.

By putting aside military issues and the large-scale industrial exploitation of sea-based natural resources it was possible to arrive at an agreement on collaboration between the four nations to which the Barents Region territories belong. The intention was to stimulate and facilitate long-term collaborative activities that would ultimately benefit the population of the new transnational regional constellation. It was also hoped that the agreement would lead to an opening of the previously closed east-west border and to an increased mutual understanding of the conditions of life and the future prospects of the people living in different parts of the region.

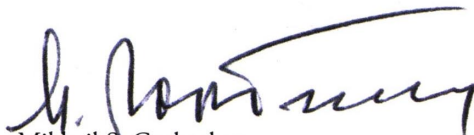
Today, we can see how some of the expected long-term effects of the establishment of the Barents Region are beginning to materialize. We find it particularly satisfying to note that activities aimed at increasing citizens' knowledge of the region's geographic, socio-economic, and cultural situation and its history are now producing substantial results through the joint work of a large number of researchers, teachers, journalists, and cultural workers. This encyclopedia is an excellent demonstration of what can be achieved through broad and intensive collaboration. More than 300 people from all over the Barents Region have contributed to what you are now holding in your hands. *The Encyclopedia of the Barents Region*, together with its companion publication, *The Barents Region: a Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe*, a history book intended for university-level students, will significantly contribute to a better understanding of the region and its peoples.

We congratulate the authors of the articles, the editors and, not least, the readers who now have access to these new sources of information, and we hope that the citizens

of the Barents Region will be stimulated to proceed along the chosen road toward a peaceful and sustainable development of the entire region.



Thorvald Stoltenberg
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs
in Norway



Mikhail S. Gorbachev
Former President of the Soviet Union