

The Northern Coalition:

The first experience of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) effort to consolidate in the Barents region

By: Sergey Zhavoronkin
E-mail: russbell@polarcom.ru

The Northern Coalition is an alliance of non-governmental environmental organizations. It is established to coordinate activities in environmental and social problems of oil and gas industry development in the North-West of Russia.

Background

The speed of oil and gas industry development in the Barents region will increase soon. Development of offshore oil and gas fields will assist this process. It increases risks for fragile Arctic nature and affects interests of inhabitants.

The Federal center and regions, located nearby the shelf are to be prepared for this variant of development. One of the important factors of such preparedness is the experience exchange, connected with the amount of input of oil and gas industry into sustainable development of the territories. World practice shows that all the activities, connected with oil and gas condensate production and transportation have caused various environmental problems. Degradation of the natural capital makes barriers to social-economical development and assist in loss of investment attraction in the region.

Taking these reasons into account, environmental NGOs think it is necessary to consolidate efforts of society in order to make a constructive dialogue between municipalities, authorities, environmental non-governmental organizations and companies, interested in long-terms perspectives of its business.

NGO cooperation

The Northern Coalition was established in 2003, after the international seminar "Oil and gas production and transportation in the North-west Russia: problems and possibilities for sustainable development". The coalition coordinates activities concerning environmental and



Elena Kluchnikova represents GAIA in Northern Coalition, and present here the Northern Coalition at the conference; "The oil and Gas Industry and Sustainable Development of the Barents Region" in Murmansk in November 2005.

©Bjorn Frantzen, Bioforsk Svanhovd

social problems of oil and gas industry development in the North-West of Russia. The goal of our joint work is a consolidation of efforts at all levels of society, for initiation and constructive dialogue between municipalities, authorities, NGOs and companies for sustainable development of the northern territories.

Bellona-Murmansk, Kola Environmental Coordination Center "Gaya", Biodiversity Conservation Center, and the Barents Sea project office of WWF-Russia are the members of the Northern Coalition. In 2004 "Nature and Youth" joined the Coalition. According to the rules of the Northern Coalition, every year one of the member organizations is selected to hold the position; Secretary-coordinator of the Northern Coalition. The aim of the Northern Coalition is minimization of risks and harmful impact of investigation and development of petroleum fields and petroleum transport on protected natural objects and vulnerable territories, to provide sustainable development for Barents Euro-Arctic region.

The Northern Coalition is directed by several principles for cooperation:

-Constructive dialogue and coop-

eration with authorities, special nature protection bodies, local population, oil and gas companies. -Every possible support for "Joint requirements of Russian non-governmental environmental organizations for oil and gas companies, operating in Russia, its continental shelf and in exclusive economic zone". -The Northern Coalition is not an absolute opponent of investigation, production and transportation of oil and gas, if these actions do not contradict the Coalition's goals. -The Northern Coalition supports sustainable and environmentally and socially safe economical development of the region. -The Northern Coalition does not support the idea to solve social and environmental problems of Barents Euro Arctic region at the expenses of other regions and countries.

In order to implement these tasks the Northern Coalition have arranged two international conferences. The first conference: "Oil and gas transportation through the White Sea ports. Problems and possibilities for sustainable development of municipalities" was held in 2004. The main goal of the conference was to work out an interregional program on environmental safety and sustainable development of the White Sea. In 2005, the second international conference; "Oil and gas industry and sustainable development" was held. The goal of the conference was to study the experience from other regions and countries (Sakhalin, Alaska, north of Norway) and work out recommendations for providing public participation in development of the Barents region. This conference was organized together with Bioforsk Svanhovd (Norway), and supported by the Barents secretariat.

The current task of the Northern Coalition is to start work with municipalities, first of all with municipalities where oil and gas objects exist. The northern Coalition plans to expand in the north-west of Russia and find NGO-members in Archangelsk region, Nenets Autonomous region, Republic of Karelia and Komi.

Source: BARENTSswatch 2006, The Barents Sea, Environment and Petroleum Activity.