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## EUROPAFORUM NORTHERN SWEDEN

### **Territorial cohesion - the views of Europaforum Northern Sweden**

Europaforum Northern Sweden consists of a network of politicians at local, regional, national, and European level from the counties of Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland and Västernorrland. Its objective is to increase knowledge and awareness of policy at EU level, but especially to increase involvement in shaping EU policies in matters pertaining to Northern Sweden.

Since its design and introduction, EU cohesion policy has contributed considerably to economic and social development in EU regions, meaning also in Northern Sweden. Europaforum Northern Sweden supports a strong future cohesion policy for sustainable development, competitiveness and employment in the European Union.

Europaforum Northern Sweden agrees with territorial cohesion being joined to European Union regional policy objectives for economic and social cohesion.

Europaforum Northern Sweden welcomes the invitation to dialogue – the Public Consultation on Territorial Cohesion – issued by the European Commission.

#### **1. Definition**

Territorial cohesion brings new issues to the fore and puts a new emphasis on existing ones.

- What is the most appropriate definition of territorial cohesion?
- What additional elements would it bring to the current approach to economic and social cohesion as practiced by the European Union?

Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that territorial cohesion is an approach permeating all policy design, with consideration given to specific territorial geographical conditions and potentials, the interplay between different policy areas and cooperation between different levels of governance and decision-making. Territorial cohesion includes inner-territorial relationships and those between territories with cross-border interconnections and cooperation. Consequently, the attitude of territorial cohesion is a matter of cross-border cooperation between all levels of governance, all sector areas and geographical territories.

Strengthening the territorial perspective in cohesion policy, with consideration given to the specific conditions of a territory and the development of its potential and strength, does not only contribute to the development of that territory, but also to that of the entire EU. It strengthens not only the objectives of the Lisbon strategy, but also those set for cohesion policy by the European Union. By starting out from the potential of a territory and the territorial diversity of the Union, together with the ambition of balanced development in the entire Union, cohesion among EU regions and countries is strengthened at the same time as it contributes to global EU competitiveness.



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Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that it is not the only purpose of territorial cohesion to decide to how structural funds ought to be employed. As an attitude, territorial cohesion has to cover all actions, legislation and measures at EU level, national level, regional, and local level.

Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that actions taken within the framework of territorial cohesion policy should act for a sustainable development of all parts of the European Union. This is of significant importance with a continued focus on areas defined by geographical characteristics – such regions, for example, that consist of geographically and demographically exposed regions, like regions in Northern Sweden with sparsely populated areas, long distances and a barren climate. The need for particular actions in these areas is indicated by Protocol 6 of the Accession Treaty for Sweden, Finland and Austria, and article 174 of the Lisbon Treaty underlines that particular attention shall be directed towards regions with severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, such as the northernmost regions with a very sparse population, cross-border regions and mountain regions.

The territorial perspective thus respects existing geographical conditions in terms of limitations and challenges, assets and development capacity of the area. For Northern Sweden, this means that particular consideration to the specific conditions of a sparsely populated region with long distances must be better reflected by EU policy, a fact welcomed by Europaforum Northern Sweden.

Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that it is important for the specific territorial conditions and the development potential of Northern Sweden to be at the focus of policy development, development strategies and actions at all levels of governance.

### **2. The scale and scope of territorial action**

Territorial cohesion highlights the need for an integrated approach to addressing problems on an appropriate geographical scale which may require local, regional and even national authorities to cooperate.

- Is there a role for the EU in promoting territorial cohesion? How could such a role be defined against the background of the principle of subsidiarity?
- How far should the territorial scale of policy intervention vary according to the nature of the problems addressed?
- Do areas with specific geographical features require special policy measures? If so, which measures?

Europaforum Northern Sweden underlines the importance of particular actions in Northern Sweden to alleviate the so-called permanent natural and demographic handicaps that characterize this part of the country. Without particular actions to remedy the long distances and low population concentration in this region, the prospects of Northern Sweden for the continued support of the rest of Europe with products, services and qualified research will decrease. The resources alone, that Northern Sweden generates for the European market in the form of forest, wood and mineral products mean that the EU can reduce its dependence on imports of such goods by slightly more than 10 billion Euro per year.



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The demographic change and the climate change are the largest global challenges that both Northern Sweden and the EU are facing. It is of significant importance to pay attention early to how these negative world-wide trends affect development in Northern Sweden, where long distances, a low population density and a barren climate already represent obstacles to sustainable growth. Europaforum Northern Sweden therefore emphasizes the importance for territorial cohesion policy to facilitate regionally adapted actions with the aim of meeting the challenges ahead.

In order to guarantee the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. decisions shall be taken at the lowest possible level, it is important for the regional level to participate in planning, programming and implementing future territorial cohesion policies. This is important in order to ensure that the choice of actions that these policies, and subsequently programmes, have to offer really meet existing needs at the regional level. Likewise, it is of the same importance for future cohesion policy not to be re-nationalised, and for the EU to act as a guarantor for the implementation of joint developments strategies.

Furthermore, Europaforum Northern Sweden wants to stress the importance of deriving advantages from synergies that can be obtained from a more effective coordination between development programmes/strategies introduced in the EU. Obvious examples of how clear synergies can be obtained are the priorities set in the Baltic Sea Strategy and actions in future territorial cohesion policy. In connection with the development of the Baltic Sea Strategy, Europaforum Northern Sweden has pointed out the need for actions that, amongst other things, support higher education, research, innovation including commercialisation, infrastructural investments including improved cross-connection within the Baltic region, as well as an infrastructure for IT/telecommunications. All these actions can well be coordinated towards the implementation of actions within the framework of future territorial cohesion policy.

Against the background of long distances as they prevail in Northern Europe, the Green Paper's sample solutions – general communication means that would minimize the external effects of functional cross-border cooperation, among other things – does not reflect the primary need in the northernmost parts of the EU.

Europaforum Northern Sweden considers therefore that it is of great importance for future territorial cohesion policies to respect the need for actions required to increase functionality between districts in sparsely populated parts of Northern Europe. Example of actions include; a continued support for investments that promote an effective infrastructure between countries and within/between areas in sparsely populated northern regions, as well as investments in the IT infrastructure and actions for an increased use of e-services. It is of great importance for territorial cohesion policy not only to become a policy for territorial cooperation within central areas of the EU, but to also have a North-South dimension throughout. Therefore Europaforum Northern Sweden wants to underline once more the importance for cohesion policy to ensure actions that give Northern Sweden a chance to strengthen its role as a territorially cohesive part of Europe despite its peripheral location.



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The Green Paper also points out the need for solutions concerning cross-border healthcare as well as a consistent policy in terms of infrastructure and economy towards the new border regions within the EU and between countries on both sides of the former iron curtain. Even though these proposals are of the highest relevance seen from a European perspective, it is difficult to see how a policy directed towards cross-border cooperation in central parts of Europe can contribute to increased territorial cohesion between northernmost Europe and the EU. In order to achieve a continued strong European development also outside the so-called Pentagon, it is of great importance for territorial cohesion policy to guarantee actions that meet the needs of e.g. competence and workforce supply, research and development, innovation, commercialisation and entrepreneurship, as the needs surrounding these areas are shaped by the particular prevailing conditions in Northern Sweden.

### 3. Better cooperation

Increased cooperation across regional and national borders raises questions of governance.

- What role should the Commission play in encouraging and supporting territorial cooperation?
- Is there a need for new forms of territorial cooperation?
- Is there a need to develop new legislative and management tools to facilitate cooperation, including along the external borders?

Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that one of the tasks of the Commission to support territorial cohesion is to participate in the constant development of multi-level governance. Moreover, the EU has a continued responsibility for the overall implementation of strategies. In many cases, the development of a cohesive territory will involve a dialogue between the Community, several nations and several regions inside and outside of Union borders. The Commission's task ought to be to initiate and lead a dialogue about common political goals and the clarification of responsibility levels.

The Commission can support the development of territorial cohesion by designing future Community policy in a way that supports coordinated goals and cohesive overall planning, and by discussing it with the member states and regions.

This means that territorial cohesion is a question not only for DG Regional Policy, but also for other general directorates, for example Transport, Environment, Agriculture and Rural development. The EU Commission can and ought to support territorial cohesion with cohesive administration in all policy areas.

Europaforum Northern Sweden considers it very important that the principle of subsidiarity be kept. This means that it is very important for the regional level to participate in planning, programming and implementing future territorial cohesion policies.

In addition to this, the member states' ambition and efforts to remove barriers that obstruct territorial cooperation across national borders, needs to be strengthened. The instrument of interregional cooperation (Interreg) offers opportunities for development work across national borders.



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This instrument is important and needs to be developed further in order to achieve better coordination – both between the different parts of the interregional cooperation, and with other instruments of cohesion policy.

### 4. Better coordination

Improving territorial cohesion implies better coordination between sectoral and territorial policies and improved coherence between territorial interventions.

- How can coordination between territorial and sectoral policies be improved?
- Which sectoral policies should give more consideration to their territorial impact when being designed? What tools could be developed in this regard?
- How can the coherence of territorial policies be strengthened?
- How can Community and national policies be better combined to contribute to territorial cohesion?

If territorial cohesion is to be developed, Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that this presupposes that measures to achieve it are placed above sector-developing measures, the reason being that plans according to sector often entail difficulties with reaching overall political objectives because every sector tends to see to its own goals. Sector policy hence prevents territorial cohesion to a large extent.

In order to better develop territorial cohesion, it is necessary to develop multi-level governance. The EU community, the nation and the regional and local level formulate goals together and elaborate strategies for the responsibility of each level for their implementation. The system of Community Strategic Guidelines, national strategies for competitiveness and employment, and regional development strategies represent a good basis for this work.

Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that the elaboration of new measures to benefit sectors is not warranted. The instrument to achieve territorial cohesion is to give the regional political level access to a concerted responsibility for regional development.

By means of well-developed multi-level governance, the political goals for the development of a region will be well embedded at all levels, with a clear allocation of responsibilities between the levels in terms of implementation/execution and a clear, concerted planning responsibility for the regional political level with access to all planning instruments. Sectoral planning should be subordinated to regional planning.

The responsibility of the national level for the development of territorial cohesion is to coordinate national resources, so that each territory is given the best possible conditions to develop. Removing barriers that obstruct transnational cooperation within territories is a national responsibility.

### 5. New territorial partnerships

The pursuit of territorial cohesion may also imply wider participation in the design and implementation of policies.



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- Does the pursuit of territorial cohesion require the participation of new actors in policymaking, such as representatives of the social economy, local stakeholders, voluntary organisations and NGOs?
- How can the desired level of participation be achieved?

Europaforum Northern Sweden considers that territorial cohesion is an attitude that emerges when different interest groups, different communities and different cultures share a common goal. It is or has been the task of politics to “fuse” the viewpoints and intentions of these different groups and to formulate goals that are embraced by the majority. Thus territorial cohesion requires no other democratic embedding than that for any other planning model.

### **6. Improving understanding of territorial cohesion**

- What quantitative/qualitative indicators should be developed at EU level to monitor characteristics and trends in territorial cohesion?

Europaforum Northern Sweden wants to emphasize the importance of selecting the measuring indicators, at local or regional level, as there are big differences within Sweden in terms of population trends, for instance. At NUTS 3 level, the whole of Sweden, except the areas around the three large cities of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö, was classified as being at the same level in ESPON data on "Urban-rural typology", namely as “low urban influence, low human footprint”, which means the vast variations between the regions were not made evident.

It is difficult to say exactly what indicators ought to measure territorial cohesion, because this depends on how territorial cohesion is defined, and on what practical consequences it may have. As an example of the complexity of finding appropriate indicators for similar concepts, one can look at Statistics Sweden (SCB), who have been measuring “sustainable development” at national level since 2006, with the aid of no less than 87 indicators within the six overall areas of health, consumption and production, economic development, social cohesion, environment and climate, as well as global development.

Europaforum Northern Sweden wants to particularly emphasize the importance of indicators that show population trends, access to infrastructure/communications and education, emergence of employment market regions, development trends in the form of cluster development, competitiveness, emergence of research, innovation and company formation. By tradition, Northern Sweden has had a strong raw materials industry which is of great importance for the entire EU, and it is also at the leading edge in creative industries and research-intensive activities, for example. All these development trends are important to monitor, and Europaforum Northern Sweden also wants to emphasize that statistics must be kept up-to-date and quality-ensured.



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It is also important to find appropriate indicators that measure the increased coordination between different levels of governance within larger functional regions. In its answer to the Consultation on Baltic Sea Strategy, Europaforum Northern Sweden stressed, among other things, that we see a particularly strong need for the coordination of infrastructure planning and investments in countries surrounding the Baltic Sea, and that HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan should be implemented. In this context, a follow-up on EU Baltic Sea Strategy and what it entails for the increased cooperation of authorities and sectors, can serve as a pilot case when it comes to measuring territorial cohesion.