



REGIONAL COUNCIL OF LAPLAND



POHJOIS-POHJANMAAN LIITTO
COUNCIL OF OULU REGION

The case of sparsely populated regions in future European Cohesion Policy

The North Calotte Council organised “the North Calotte Europaforum” on 9th of April, 2003 in Haparanda on the Swedish/Finnish border. The purpose of the forum was to discuss the future cohesion policy of the European Union. As representatives of sparsely populated regions, they adopted the following joint resolution.

1. Representatives of the sparsely populated regions strongly support the continuation of a European Union regional policy on the basis of solidarity and stability in the context of an enlarged Union. Such a policy should aim for balanced development in all European regions. It is clear that interventions from the structural funds Objective 6 and today's Objective 1 programmes have contributed in making progress substantially on regional development in the regions in Northern Sweden and Finland.
2. The sparsely populated regions in Northern Sweden and Finland, with a population of 1.9 million people in an area of 447,000 km², have the lowest population density in Europe, at 4.3 persons per km². The natural and geographical conditions facing these regions are permanent and of a cumulative and exacerbated nature, with low population density, cold climate and long distances both to European and national markets, and within the regions. In addition these regions are also facing demographic challenges with out-migration and ageing population. In the enlarged European Union, the distance to the centre will increase and these areas will be even more peripheral.
3. In future European Union regional policy, the criteria for structural funds support to sparsely populated regions should remain on the basis of Protocol 6 in the Accession Agreement for Sweden, Finland and Austria. Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen legislation regarding the sparsely populated regions, so that it is also reflected in other European Union policies such as competition policy, environmental policy and transport policy.
4. Moreover, the sparsely populated regions need to be covered by a special instrument of a permanent nature, which will guarantee sufficient financial allocations in parity with the Objective 1 programmes 2000-2006. This has to be reflected in support-levels, geographic coverage and co-financing levels. It is also important that it should allow for broad programmes involving a wide scope of activities addressing the complexity of the problems in these areas.
5. The geographic and natural conditions in the sparsely populated regions are valuable assets for the whole of Europe. There are unique opportunities for recreation in, and exploration of, a high quality environment. These regions are rich in natural resources and have a unique cultural and traditional heritage. This is home to the indigenous peoples of Europe, the Saami culture. The development of new technology taking advantage of the cold climate and ICT solutions in production of services, for example in

telemedicine and in distance learning, will be shared with other European regions and thereby contribute to European added value.

6. Nordic sparsely populated regions will present a more precise proposal for the outline of the future Cohesion policy at the seminar "**Regional development in Sparsely populated regions – bringing added value to entire Europe**" to be held in Brussels on the 10th of June 2003.

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