



EU commission  
EU parliament  
Government of Sweden  
Swedish Riksdag  
Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation

## **Europaforum Northern Sweden's views on the revision of EU Arctic Policy**

Europaforum Northern Sweden (EFNS) is a network of politicians on local and regional level from Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland Härjedalen och Västernorrland. EFNS is a knowledge arena to analyze EU policies and discuss how they affect Northern Sweden. EFNS monitors European issues to influence EU legislation, EU strategies and action programmes, as well as the EU Budget. The objective of EFNS is to safeguard the interests of northern Sweden in EU policies with communication aimed towards both the European institutions and the national level.

Due to the ongoing revision of the EU Arctic Policy, EFNS wishes to make the following comments:

- EFNS welcomes the revision of the EU Arctic Policy
- The EU can be an important actor and facilitator for the sustainable development of the Arctic
- The EU should focus more on sustainable regional development in and around the Arctic, as actions for sustainable growth tackles both climate change and geopolitical tensions
- The EU Arctic needs a continuous, ambitious and long-term investment policy
- The EFNS supports a continuous focus on climate change mitigation and resilience by the EU
- Continued dialogue with the EU Arctic regions is the key to unlocking the potential of the EU Arctic.
- The EU and the EFNS should support an approach for minority communities to address complex societal challenges together

### **Europaforum welcomes the revision of the EU Arctic Policy**

EU has taken an engaged role in establishing a link and dialogue with the regions in the Arctic. The legitimacy and abilities for the EU to improve the peaceful and sustainable development of the Arctic depends strongly on alliances with stakeholders in and around the Arctic, as well as the provision of support and investments for sustainable development of the European Arctic. EU should keep its momentum of the stakeholder consultation process that was initiated by the integrated EU Arctic communication from 2016, and with the EU Arctic Forum in Umeå 2019 being established as a result of the dialogue with the stakeholders in Sweden, Finland and Norway.

### **EU, an important facilitator for sustainable development in the EU Arctic**

A vital game-changer in the integrated EU Arctic policy from 2016 is the increased focus on supporting sustainable development in the Arctic region. EU has great potential to be a facilitator for the Arctic to be a peaceful, sustainable and thriving place, by investing in infrastructure, research, collaboration and development on a people to people, researcher to researcher and business to business basis in the European Arctic.



The regional economy in northern Sweden remains vulnerable due to the lack of own critical mass, although the European Arctic is comparatively populated and advanced with arctic know-how, as well as potentials to deliver solutions on many global challenges. But adapted support and tailor-made policies to fit the Arctic challenges in northern Sweden are still needed. The increasing demand for raw materials due to the green shift in technology, will increase the pressure on sustainable extraction and refinement, all for which the regions in the EU Arctic are at the global frontline with skills and competence throughout the whole value chain.

EU should continue to deepen the dialogue with regions on the future of EU Arctic policy. The establishment and continuation of an EU Ambassador for the Arctic in Large is an important decision that has full support from EFNS. The European Parliament friendship group for the Arctic is also an appreciated initiative to raise awareness and put Arctic issues on the EU agenda. The debate on climate, natural resources and sustainable development, in the light of growing geopolitical interests, need to be addressed by the highest EU level with a continued inclusive process that engages all relevant stakeholders for an updated comprehensive EU Arctic Policy.

### **The Arctic perspective on EU policy**

EU highlighting the need to promote and contribute to sustainable regional development in the Arctic is an achievement in itself. In comparison to earlier efforts from the EU, the priority marks a slight shift in how European institutions perceive the Arctic as a strategically important territory within the European Union, with potential for growth to the benefit of both the arctic citizens and all of Europe. The EU ambition to enhance economic, social and environmental resilience in the Arctic is a balanced recognition that has been well received by the regions in the EU Arctic.

EFNS has noted an unfortunate lack of Arctic perspectives being brought to the agenda in recent years. Hopefully the revision process of the EU Arctic Policy can engage the EU institutions to broaden the scope and link the territorial dimension of the Arctic to a wider range of key policy areas.

### **Sustainable regional development – the key to the Arctic**

Sustainable regional development in the Arctic is the most relevant priority for the European Union moving forward, as actions for sustainable growth incorporates partial answers on how to tackle both climate change and geopolitical tensions. Climate change, globalization and growing geopolitical unrest are Arctic challenges that calls for joint political action at all levels of governance. The EU needs a continuous, ambitious and long-term investment policy for the Arctic to boost innovation, create growth and jobs, increase accessibility and connectivity, while transforming industries and promoting sustainability through multilateral cooperation and multi-level governance.

EU as a political force in the Arctic, relies heavily on the alliances with stakeholders both in and around the Arctic to be able to deliver a development that is peaceful and sustainable, while also being able to unlock potential for investments and innovations that can lead the green transition. High ambitions for regional sustainable development require close cooperation with the member states in the EU, but perhaps even more engagement with the regional and local levels of government.



The European Arctic is not merely vast wilderness with natural landscapes attractive to global tourism. The northernmost EU are indeed extremely sparsely populated in a European context, but in fact quite dense in a greater Arctic context. The societies in northernmost Sweden are advanced facilitators for growth despite Arctic challenges, with top universities that have become important regional hubs for new technology, lead research and innovation, enabling green transition and global development. However, vulnerable societies such as those in northernmost Sweden need external investment capital, especially for connectivity and accessibility. Distance spanning technology is a prerequisite for creating critical mass through cooperation across borders and mobilizing stakeholders. The EU has had and will continue to have a vital role to enable these structural challenges.

Stakeholders at local, regional and national levels of governance have been brought together in a consistent effort to accomplish common targets by their involvement in projects financed by the EU. Smaller organisations, municipalities and actors with lack of institutional capacity have been provided with incentives to act in larger contexts, cooperate and adopt EU's objectives. Through the EU Cohesion Policy and other sorts of financial resources, the EU has strengthened its legitimacy at the local and regional levels within the EU.

Place-based instruments such as the structural funds and territorial cooperation has proven to be substantial tools for regions to tailor investments to fit the common needs for capacity building, research and innovation, transport and digital infrastructure. The EU policy tools should be further developed and linked to the EU Arctic Policy to continue to tackle global challenges and unlock potential for sustainable growth in the European Arctic.

### **Battling Climate Change in the Arctic**

The Arctic is a unique ecosystem with unique challenges and potentials. Climate change affects the Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions more than any other region worldwide. The negative impacts need global attention, including from the EU as a major influencer on and supporter of the Arctic region. However, it is important to recall that the climate effects do not, other than on the margin, have their origin in the Arctic. In that respect, the focus and legislative measures have to be of general and global nature.

The EFNS supports a continuous focus on climate change mitigation and resilience by the EU, with the ambition to reach climate neutrality. The Green Deal is a well needed long-term response to the growing challenges of climate change through an amplified investment agenda for sustainable growth. In order for the climate policies to be effective, they need continue to build on the involvement of partnerships with regions, local communities, civil society and industry.

### **Finding the Balance between preservation and precaution and the sustainable use and development of the economic potential across the Arctic regions**

In the European Arctic, there is an extensive need for more investments in digital and transport infrastructure, support for development of SME's in place-dependent sectors like tourism, energy, bioeconomy and sustainable extraction and processing.

Northern Sweden has highly developed and progressive societies that promotes sustainable development, while also facing several structural challenges such as long



distances, sparse population, harsh climate and an unbalanced demography which makes competition on the global market difficult. Furthermore, raw-material-based economies deliver large revenues to the industrial owners and the beneficiaries but bring few re-investments back into local societies. This creates an imbalance and an excessive need for special attention from the EU as a beneficiary of the Arctic and the region's minerals, marine resources, forests, energy supplies, that are indispensable for European industries and economic, sustainable growth.

The EU plays a key role to facilitate multilevel dialogues, while ensuring principles of partnership and inclusion. The OECD's territorial review of the Northern sparsely populated areas in 2017 shows the great diversity of capacities within indigenous peoples, and these can be better utilized by strengthening opportunities for leadership, economic management, sustainability and the building of strategic capacity and collaboration for larger critical mass. A key policy recommendation from the OECD to tackle these challenges is to build alliances to increase scale and address issues of common interest.

#### **The EU Arctic Policy complementary to EU Member State actions in the Arctic**

Although extremely sparsely populated in a European context, northern Sweden is quite dense with a large population in a comparison to the greater Arctic. But the demographic challenges in large parts of the European Arctic is the same as elsewhere in the Arctic, with an aging and declining population causing problems for functional labour markets and provision of public services. The global, accelerating urbanisation trend is difficult to turn around, while creating attractive societies in sparsely populated areas requires a complex set of policy tools tailored to fit the specific needs and potentials at the local and regional level.

The EU Arctic Policy should be better linked to the EU investment tools already in place, given that they can be better adapted to fit the different territorial conditions. For example, the European Social Fund+ which could possibly be better linked to the smart specialization strategy platforms to target labor and skills provision, as well as boost social innovations tailored to the specific needs of Arctic communities.

#### **Intergovernmental and regional cooperation in the Arctic**

The Arctic has been a low-tension area due to constructive dialogues among the states and regions and peoples concerned. This can however change as the environmental strains accelerate and economic interests increase. The changing conditions implies more focus on international cooperation and the need to use and develop the cooperative platforms that already exist. The European Arctic is and should remain an area of low tension with balanced relations with Northwest Russia. The EU's continued engagement in the Barents Euro Arctic Cooperation is very much welcomed, also on the regional level in the framework of the Regional Barents cooperation.

Complex challenges require broad collaborations between actors at multiple levels with different perspectives. The interregional programmes in the European Arctic, including the cross-border cooperation programmes, along with the aim of more efficient and focused investments in research, innovation and connectivity, are decisive instruments for continuous multilateral efforts. The Northern Dimension policy, ND, is also an important tool for cooperation through its partnerships that can substantially help in e.g. creating concrete



environmental, economic and cultural activities by promoting overall people-to-people, business-to-business, and researcher-to-researcher dialogue.

### **The importance of Science**

Science and innovation play a significant role to create stability, develop businesses and industries in the regions to deliver added values to Europe, as shown in the OECD Territorial Review of the NSPA. The EU has an important role as a funder and coordinator of research. However, a big share of the EU's contributions to the Arctic remains unrecognized due to a far too narrow definition of "Arctic research" used in practice of the European Commission.

The EU invests substantially in research and innovation to develop the European Arctic from a broader perspective in line with the ambitions outlined in the integrated policy, including research in bioeconomy, extractive industries, business development, 5G, health, indigenous issues, migration, atmospheric science and space technology etcetera, but these domains are unfortunately not considered as Arctic-related by the EU-commission.

### **EFNS calls for flexible EU-funds**

The EFNS calls for flexibility to invest EU-funds in airport infrastructure in the European Arctic, and thus support the restart of economic activities in the northernmost regions of Europe. The total shutdown of air-traffic due to the pandemic has painfully exposed the fragility and dependence on access to airports for remote communities and businesses, such as tourism, testbeds to global industries and SMEs delivering niche products and services through global value chains. At the same time as the air industry is undergoing a current decline in demand, major technological developments to reduce carbon emissions are evolving rapidly. Industrial shifts that will require significant investments in airport infrastructure, especially in regions with long distances where there are few reasonable alternatives to air traffic.

### **Adopted by Europaforum northern Sweden on November 6, 2020**

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