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The European Parliament, The European Commission, The European External Action Service, The European Committee of the Regions, The Swedish Government, The Swedish Parliament, SALAR

Europaforum Northern Sweden welcomes the EU's integrated policy on the Arctic region

Europaforum Northern Sweden (EFNS) is a network for local and regional level politicians from Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland, Härjedalen, and Västernorrland. EFNS is a meeting place and information forum where EU policy is analysed and discussed in relation to how it affects northern Sweden. EFNS monitors EU issues to influence laws, strategies, and action programmes of the EU, including its budget. The purpose of EFNS is to safeguard the interests of northern Sweden, at both the European and national level, on issues with a clear European perspective.

Europaforum Northern Sweden welcomes the joint message from the European Commission and the European External Action Service on 27th April 2016, regarding an integrated EU policy for the Arctic region. The message is based on previous EU communications regarding the Arctic, focusing on climate challenges, the importance of international collaborations, and the need for more research in and about the Arctic region; often concentrating on sustainable use of Arctic resources and dialogue with indigenous populations around the Arctic, including the Sami people in northern Sweden.

The policies presented here more clearly address sustainable regional development in the Arctic region and especially in the European Arctic, which includes northern Sweden. Joint investment priorities must be created in consultation with affected regions and States in order to create sustainable societies that release the inherent potential for development in the area. The legitimacy of the EU in the Arctic is linked to support for long-term development of the Arctic region in close collaboration with the people living here. The natural starting point for the EU in the Arctic is its own Arctic regions, in close collaboration with neighbouring states and all stakeholders in the Arctic macroregion.

Representatives for the regions in northern Sweden support the proposed direction of the EU, and want to especially emphasize the importance of EU focus on regional development contributing to growth that benefits all of Europe. Europaforum Northern Sweden welcomes the new EU policy and the conclusions of the European Council adopted in June 2016. They provide a strong foundation for the future, with expectations that the European Parliament will fully support the importance of continued EU investment in sustainable economic development in northernmost Europe and the entire Arctic region.

An active policy for climate, research, and partnerships in the Arctic with EU support

The Arctic is a unique ecosystem with unique challenges and opportunities. Climate change will impact the Arctic and subarctic regions more than anywhere else. This negative impact demands global attention, including from the EU, which has a significant impact on climate, and to contribute necessary support to the Arctic region to manage the impact of climate change.



However, it is important to remember that climate change does not, other than marginally, have its origin in the Arctic. Climate measures and regulations aimed at reducing global GHG emissions and other negative environmental effects should therefore be general in approach. The Swedish Arctic regions are currently leading the charge in environmental and climate measures and can serve as an example for others, though there is still much to do.

EFNS supports the EU focus on countering climate change and improving the ability to manage its effect on the world. It is important that the EU adopts the international climate goals agreed on in Paris in December 2015. EFNS also strongly supports the EU's focus on Arctic research. EFNS has several globally recognized research institutions with high levels of competency within Arctic research areas, as in climate, the environment, technology, and sociology. It is vital that research on the Arctic and the opportunities it offers, as with new climate-efficient technology in extreme environments, is also made available to the operators and research centres located in or having local knowledge of the Arctic region.

The Arctic has long been a region of low tension due to good dialogue between the states, regions and peoples involved. This may, however, change when the environment changes and economic interest in the area increases. This increases the importance of international cooperation, not least through using and developing the platforms for collaboration that already exist – for the European Arctic to remain an area of low political tensions with balanced and practical relations with north-western Russia. EFNS welcomes the EU's interest and involvement in continued experience exchanges and partnership activities, on regional and local levels as well as from people to people. The so-called Northern Dimension is an example of such a partnership between the EU and several states in northern Europe including Russia, in order to support local partnerships and specific investment in infrastructure that can bind the border regions closer together. In line with new EU policy, the Arctic component in this partnership must be reinforced.

EU support for sustainable regional development to release the economic potential of the Arctic

EFNS appreciates the activities of the European Commission in terms of having a concrete dialogue with regions and stakeholders in preparing the new policy. We hope the EU will continue building on these and we look forward to being a constructive and contributing partner, including through partnering with regions in northern Finland and Norway in the joint network for Northern Sparsely Populated Areas, NSPA.

EFNS especially welcomes the EU's emphasis on sustainable regional development with the help of EU instruments such as the European Structural and Investment Fund, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Interregional programmes (Interreg), programs for cross-border partnerships with Russia (CBC), and other financial instruments for more efficient and focused investments in research, innovation, and accessibility. The European Arctic has great potential to contribute to the European market and economy. This requires securing continued investments for regions located far to the north which face specific structural challenges.



The regions of the European Arctic have well-developed communities and strive toward sustainable development, but also face several challenges – vast distances, sparse populations, harsh climates, and unbalanced demographics, which makes competing with other regions difficult. Also, economies are small and based on basic materials, which results in significant revenues for owners and operators, but little reinvestment in local communities. This creates imbalances and a need for special attention from the EU as a recipient and consumer of mining, forestry, and energy production, which are necessary for European industry and contribute to economic growth across Europe.

In addition to support for innovations and sustainable development, two concrete investment areas must be highlighted – the need for investment in ICT and transport infrastructure to connect the European Arctic. Broadband enables managing needs in distant, sparsely populated areas with harsh climates. Infrastructure is the key to sustainable Arctic communities and is necessary for connecting and integrating regions in the European Arctic, and to connect transport systems with Europe and the rest of the world. It is positive that the EU communication recognises this.

In this context, the EU TEN-T policy, and other initiatives such as the Northern Dimension partnership for transportation and logistics, are of great significance to the Arctic region. This facilitates accessibility in north-south and east-west directions, and thereby our region's ability to contribute to EU prosperity. It is especially positive that proposals have been aired within the European Commission for extending the Scandinavia-Mediterranean and North Sea-Baltic Sea transport corridors with the so-called Bothnian Corridor from north to south along both sides of the Bay of Bothnia and to Narvik in Norway. This will create a future central artery linking the European Arctic to the rest of the EU, and binding the EU rail system northwards on the Swedish side.

OECD report, Arctic investment priorities and smart specialisation in close dialogue with the EU

In 2017, the OECD will launch a Territorial Review of the 14 northernmost regions in Sweden, Norway, and Finland within the framework for the NSPA network. The report was initiated in light of the regions' awareness of a need for increased cooperation, between the regions – and at the national and EU levels – to counter these areas' lack of critical mass, institutional capacity, and capital. The report will deliver relevant crucial understanding of the regions and recommendations for investment priorities and smart specialisation strategies. The EFNS and NSPA hope to use the findings of the OECD report to enable joint activities with the EU to further develop the northern European regions for the benefit of the EU, and also EU interests in the Arctic.

EFNS welcomes the EU's ambition to create joint platforms and support for investment in the region, and for the creation of an annual Arctic Forum starting in 2018 for the implementation of the EU's Arctic policy. In the coming year, the EU and these regions, countries, and other stakeholders will establish priorities for EU Arctic policies through the *Arctic Stakeholder Forum*, for more efficient support in developing the Arctic region. Emphasis is on EU funds and programmes and other support for the northernmost regions, in order to contribute to improved coordination and the common



good. EFNS fully supports the initiative in order to contribute to sustainable economic development in the European Arctic.

Through partnerships in northern Sweden and other regions within the NSPA network, the EFNS wants to contribute to greater understanding of specific regional challenges in the Arctic, and to contribute to development throughout the EU with the unique competencies and abilities of these regions. In this respect, the OECD report can be a strong foundation for continued efforts.

Still, the EFNS will emphasize that this does not necessarily involve engaging in entirely new or different activities, rather these are continuing efforts to develop, coordinate, and improve investment and activities underway through continued EU special support for these northernmost sparsely-populated regions. This is vital in achieving the goals of the Policy for the Arctic which has been introduced and is ready for implementation. The new aspect of the EU integrated policy for the Arctic is the continued development of the close and beneficial dialogue that has been established between the EU and relevant regions in order to offer a better cohesive support for real regional development within the framework for the EU's Arctic involvement.

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