



The Government of Sweden
The European Commission

Statement of the views of Europaforum Norra Sverige ahead of the final negotiations

Europaforum Norra Sverige (EFNS) is a network for politicians at the local and regional levels in Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland and Västernorrland. EFNS is a meeting place and knowledge arena in which EU policies that affect northern Sweden are analysed and discussed. The EFNS follows European issues in order to influence the legislation, strategies and plans of action of the EU, as well as the EU's budget. The aim of the EFNS is to consider the interests of northern Sweden, both in the European arena and at the national level, in issues that have a clear European perspective.

In connection with the ongoing dialogue between the European Commission and Sweden, Europaforum Norra Sverige wishes to express its views, based on the perspective/ needs and opportunities of northern Sweden.

The strategic position of northern Sweden is of tremendous importance for the EU, including its nations and regions, and for its preparedness for future development. This concerns, among other matters, the development of the arctic regions and the effects of this on trade, the environment, indigenous people and transport. The European Commission and the Swedish government have raised the issue that development in sparsely populated areas in northern Sweden should be supported. The additional allocation in the form of a bonus for sparsely populated areas is intended to promote the opportunities for development and to meet the challenges in these areas, in accordance with the objectives of Europe 2020. In the guidelines of the Swedish government for the development of proposals to the regional structural fund programmes, the following is stated:

“In accordance with the proposal of the Commission, there are special funds dedicated to sparsely populated regions that fulfil the criteria in article 2 in protocol no 6 in the treaty of accession for Austria, Finland and Sweden. Regarding Sweden, this concerns the programme areas of Central Norrland and Upper Norrland. These funds can finance the thematic areas 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7. These funds must be considered as being in addition to other ear-marked resources, which for the regions concerned means that they may choose the distribution between these thematic objectives.”

In principle, Europaforum Norra Sverige is against the Commission, without a dialogue in accordance with the multi-level governance principle, stating which areas must be given priority. However, in this case, EFNS considers that the priorities agree with those of northern Sweden. EFNS wishes therefore to ensure that the Commission's proposals for sparsely populated regions are retained.

Europaforum Norra Sverige considers that the multi-level governance principle is important for the implementation of cohesion policy. Participation at the regional and local levels is decisive for delivering the priorities of the EU. It is important that the regional and local levels are given a real influence in the process and that the regions have the opportunity to affect the composition of the partnership and the priorities that are made. Europaforum would like to



remind the national representatives and the Commission to respect the principle of subsidiarity in accordance with the treaties.

Europaforum Norra Sverige wishes to emphasise that it is important that:

- Sweden strengthens the role of the local and regional levels in development work by increasing regional responsibility and the regional coordination of the use of funds.
- Use is made of the unique development potential of northern Sweden by additional allocations and cross-border collaboration with the surrounding regions, in accordance with Europe 2020 and the Baltic Sea Strategy.
- Within the framework for thematic concentration, it is made possible for the regions to meet their unique challenges, including within Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the transport infrastructure in northern Sweden.
- Funding of the development of the countryside is not reduced to the extent that is being indicated.

Efforts for the attractive sparsity

A functioning and accessible infrastructure for IT has great importance for opportunities to live, run businesses and provide social services in northern Sweden. One challenge is that in large areas of the sparsely populated and rural districts of northern Sweden, there is a lack of incentives for the market to make the investments needed in broadband infrastructure. There are areas that completely lack the option of both landline and mobile connections of good quality. In order to make use of the potential that digital technologies, IT and the Internet provide, efforts are needed to promote an increased access to IT-infrastructure.

By extending high-quality broadband and mobile coverage, new methods for the use of digital technologies will provide important opportunities for new and existing companies and for people to live and develop both in towns and in the countryside. A climate-smart infrastructure is important for reaching climate targets and for offering future solutions and competitive advantages for northern Sweden. From the perspective of EFNS, those investments that can be made in sparsely populated areas with the help of the European Regional Development Fund and with the help of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development are essential for the inclusion of this region in the rest of Europe.

Because of its geographical location and its sparse population, northern Sweden is also highly dependent on well-functioning and robust transport systems for both freight and passenger traffic. Infrastructure and communications bridge long distances, strengthen the conditions for businesses and create a broader, more collaborative and more differentiated labour market. A sustainable transport system is a pre-requisite for the competitiveness and willingness to invest of businesses. Access to work, education, social services and cultural and recreational activities are also needed in sparsely-populated regions in order to create attractiveness and competitiveness.

Europaforum Norra Sverige wishes to emphasise that the challenges of the region regarding sustainable transport and bottle-necks in the infrastructure must continue to be given priority and coordinated between all levels. This allocation of resources to sparsely-populated areas offers considerable opportunities for the co-funding of strategic, opportunity-creating and sustainable transport projects. To ensure better co-usage between different types of transport (shipping/railway/road transport) and a climate-smart, sustainable transport system and travel, it is of great importance that funds from the regional fund should be able to be used. The increased energy efficiency of the transport system is one of the most important measures for



reducing the use of fossil energy. Investments in infrastructure by the EU could be reinforced by national and regional investments that could benefit the economy of northern Sweden.

Europaforum Norra Sverige is looking forward to a continued dialogue and we welcome you to Europaforum on 20-21 February 2014 in Sundsvall.

Agreed by EUROPAFORUM NORRA SVERIGE, Umeå, 24 October 2013

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