

## The NSPA views on the EU Arctic Policy ahead of EU Arctic Forum 2019

*The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas network, NSPA, represents the interests of the four northernmost counties and regions of Sweden (Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland Härjedalen and Västernorrland), seven northernmost and eastern regions of Finland (Central Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, Lapland, North Karelia, Northern Ostrobothnia, Pohjois-Savo and South Savo) and North Norway (Finnmark, Troms and Nordland).*

### **NSPA appreciates the established cooperation with the EU on Arctic matters**

In connection with the EU Arctic Forum in Umeå 3-4 October 2019, the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas Network, NSPA, would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the EU Commission and the European External Action Service for the close, good and fruitful cooperation on the Arctic. The European Union is an important actor on Arctic matters together with its regional partners in the European Arctic of Sweden and Finland, as well as the close neighbours in North Norway.

We appreciate that the EU have taken an engaged role in establishing a link and dialogue with the regions in the Arctic. For the future it is crucial to keep up the momentum of the stakeholder consultation process that was established by the integrated EU Arctic communication from 2016, with the EU Arctic Forum being established as a result of the dialogue with the NSPA.

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

EU have to use its soft power to be a relevant partner in the Arctic and can do so by investing in the European Arctic, the EU's own Arctic region and neighbouring areas. 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 research, collaboration and development on a people to people, researcher to researcher and business to business basis across borders in the European Arctic, whilst also giving EU the needed legitimacy concerning the larger Arctic.

The NSPA and the Barents Euro Arctic region that constitute Northern Finland, Sweden and Norway, as well as for the latter also Northwest Russia, is unique in an Arctic context. It is crucial that the region can be an attractive place for people to live and stay to give stability to the region and beyond. The Arctic region remains economically vulnerable due to the lack of own critical mass of people and capital, although the European Arctic is comparatively populated and advanced with Arctic know-how, as well as potentials to deliver solutions on many global challenges. Adapted support and tailor-made policies to fit the Arctic challenges are, though, needed.

### **EU should continue to deepen the dialogue with regions on the future of EU Arctic policy**

We find the discussions at the EU Arctic Forum to be very important for the future. We see many important contributions, such as recent reports, delivered to the debate from the EU Commission and the EEAS. We also fully support the establishment and continuation of an Ambassador for the Arctic in Large and hope to see an Arctic working party in the European Parliament to be established.

However, we note an unfortunate lack of Arctic perspectives in the preparations for the incoming new EU commission. The debate on climate, resources and sustainable development, in the light of growing geopolitical interests, need to be addressed by highest EU level with a continued inclusive process that engages all relevant stakeholders for an updated comprehensive EU Arctic Policy.

We are prepared to continue be a constructive and engaged partner, and we hope the EU will continue to listen to, believe in and invest in the European Arctic as a gateway to the larger Arctic and ultimately contribute to global sustainable development. We hope this to be a strong message to take from the discussions at the EU Arctic Forum in Umeå.

*The NSPA Steering Committee, Umeå, Sweden, 2 October 2019*