

Pressemelding

Øst-Finnmarkrådet har i dag sendt inn høring på EU sin Arktiske politikk.

EU har i løpet av 2020 begynt arbeidet med å revidere sin nye politikk for Arktis. I den forbindelse så ønsker Europakommisjonen innspill til hvordan deres fremtidige arktiske strategi burde se ut. Øst-Finnmarkrådet har nå sendt inn sitt høringssvar til EU.

Siden Arktis blir et stadig viktigere tema for både stormakter og andre ikke-arktiske stater i Europa, er det nå ekstra viktig at vi, og spesielt oss som ligger sentralt i den Europeiske delen av Arktis, gir innspill til EU og deltar i den europeiske politikktutformingene ved å gi innspill på denne høringen. Nedenunder er spørsmålene i høringen med våre svar på disse:

1. In your view, what have been the EU's main achievements and failures under each of the three priorities in the 2016 Joint Communication?

- *The feedback is given from the perspective that East-Finnmark Council (EFC) is located in the Arctic.*
- *EFC notices little or no effect of EU priorities in our area.*
- *EFC wants sustainable development in our Arctic area.*
- *There is too little development related to cross-border infrastructure, such as the railway Rovaniemi - Kirkenes and boat routes for the freight of goods.*
- *There is too little international cooperation to develop regional connections within the EU / EEA, for example, those related to the development of integration in the Scandinavian Arctic. The current regulations for cooperation under Nordkalottrådet were approved in 1967, and have not been updated along with EU cooperation regulations. The Nordkalottrådet is a regional body in the Scandinavian Arctic that coordinates development across national borders between Norway, Sweden and Finland.*
- *There is too little support from the EU in the sphere of circumpolar environmental protection that is executed by the Arctic Council, and which is of particular importance to the area within the EFC guidance.*
- *The Arctic is not only an uninhabited wild area and pristine nature, but also a well-developed area with scattered communities. This is underemphasized in the overall EU's Arctic policy.*

2. Looking forward, to what extent are the three priorities of the Joint Communication still relevant? Rate on a scale from 1 to 5, whereby 1 star is not relevant at all, 2 is somewhat irrelevant, 3 is unsure/neutral, 4 is somewhat relevant, and 5 is still very relevant.

<i>Climate Change and Safeguarding the Arctic Environment</i>	4
<i>Sustainable Development in and around the Arctic</i>	5
<i>International Cooperation on Arctic Issues</i>	4

Why? (Explain the above ratings)

- COVID-19 has led to weakening of the business community in our area as a result of significant loss of income. It is necessary to prioritize economic development in the future because business communities in Europe and the EFC area have to earn money to survive. This is of great importance to maintain settlement in the Arctic. The EFC business community generally consists of small businesses with little capital, which are vulnerable to market fluctuations. It is therefore important to prioritize the stimulation of sustainable business development in our area of the Arctic.
- The EFC region is rich in natural resources. A lot of seafood, energy and minerals are produced. Our region contributes to the EU's food reserves, energy and mineral supply. The EFC area ensures the supply of all these natural resources to the EU. Therefore, it is very important that the EU facilitates the sustainable exploitation of these resources in this area of the Arctic.
- There is a need to facilitate Arctic rural areas through more cooperation with the rest of Europe. As mentioned, the EFC area is rich in natural resources. In the future, there is a need for more trade, more infrastructure development and more innovation to strengthen value creation and settlement here.
- Programs such as KOLARCTIC, Interregg, Northern Dimension, Smart Specialization Strategies and Europe 2030 stimulating development, should be retained and strengthened in the following years.
- EFC want to express that the EU should invest in the "green energy", such as hydropower, wind power and develop hydrogen as a source of energy in Arctic rural districts. The EU should, through community solutions / international cooperation, ensure that the "green shift" takes place in the entire Arctic.
- There is a need for a long-term and ambitious investment policy that stimulates peaceful, innovative and sustainable economic development in our area of the Arctic.
- The activity in the EFC area is strongly influenced by long distances, Arctic climate challenges and small and sparsely populated communities. The EFC region is therefore particularly dependent on being able to retain government support measures to ensure growth, innovation, and to counteract negative demographic trends. Financial stimulus measures that should strengthen growth in the Arctic have to be secured in the following years.
- The EU should also secure cross-border transport networks and support infrastructure investments in the EFC area, such as, for example, the railway Rovaniemi - Kirkenes and the central port in Kirkenes. This will be important both for fish transportation from our area to the rest of Europe, as well as reduce the costs of goods flow across national borders in Europe back to our area.

3. Is enough being done at EU level to reduce the environmental impact of being a major consumer of Arctic resources? What else can be done at EU level and/or by way of its external relations, through international organizations or directly with international partners?

- *It is necessary to take more measures to reduce the environmental impact in our area of the Arctic. Nevertheless, it is important that future measures are adapted to the activity in this area. Environmental protection measures have not to be too general and unrefined that they prevent business communities from using local natural resources. Future environmental protection measures have to be adapted to local conditions and ensure availability of natural resources to local communities. This means, for example, that business communities have to be allowed to develop mining. However, this activity has to be performed as cautiously as possible based on local conditions and locally adapted environmental protection measures that will ensure local economic development with the environment being safeguarded by local conditions.*
- *A lot of businesses in the EFC area have from time immemorial been linked to sea resources. This activity depends on clean marine environment.*
- *In the future, the EU should more actively develop programs that contribute to the recycling and collection of rubbish and other items dumped in the sea.*
- *The EU should, through cross-border programs, stimulate measures that lead to the collection of plastic and other rubbish in the sea. This applies not least to micro plastic. The EU should support the Arctic Council's work against marine litter, including the special work that the Arctic Council is doing to protect the marine environment from plastic in the sea.*
- *To prevent future pollution (the "precautionary principle"), Arctic search and rescue (SAR) systems should be developed.*

4. How could the EU Arctic policy contribute to addressing more effectively the balance between the need for preservation and precaution and the sustainable use and development of the economic potential across the Arctic regions?

- *The EU should, through investment, cover the need for more digital and environmentally friendly transport infrastructure.*
- *In the future, it is important to greater involve the Arctic population to ensure local development. This should be done by supporting involvement from regional and local bodies such as EFC, municipalities and county municipalities. The background is that the foremost competence in the Arctic lies with the population in the Arctic. The population is the most important resource in the Arctic. The key to balanced development in the Arctic is to give local government agencies more local impact through the EU rules. The Scandinavian regional cooperation body in the Finish, Swedish and Norwegian Arctic, Nordkalottrådet, will be another local government structure that is going to ensure regional involvement across borders in the north.*



5. What more could be done at EU level to help ensure the sustainable development of the Arctic region which meets the needs of Arctic communities and respects the rights of indigenous peoples?

- *The Barents Euro Arctic cooperation with North-West Russia is of great importance in the EFC area. The Barents region is well developed in terms of infrastructure and sustainable business, and has several universities in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia. The regional dialogue in the Barents region with Russia is constructive and has the potential to develop regional business projects between companies in the EU / EEA and North-West Russia. The business community in Kirkenes has significant and necessary income due to customers from North-West Russia. The tourism industry in the entire EFC area has significant income from Russian tourists.*
- *There is a need to facilitate more trade across the Norwegian-Russian border in the Barents region in order to get better potential for the EFC area in the Arctic. At the regional level, the “four freedoms” in EU/EEA should be made available across the Norwegian-Russian border. This will strengthen the business community in the EFC area, which already has a small population and a weak market base.*
- *There is a need for stronger support from the EU for the institutional development of the liaison bodies in the Barents region. This should lead to more regional autonomy, and thus also more effective implementation of the EU principles in the EFC part of the Arctic region. This will in turn strengthen business development in our area.*
- *The EU should make it possible for the Sami people to practice their culture in all areas. This should be done by balancing EU regulations in accordance with Sami traditions and decisions of the Sami Parliament. Decisions of the Sami Parliament should in certain areas, concerning the preservation of local Sami culture, take precedence over the EU law.*

6. How could the EU Arctic policy best complement EU Member State action in the Arctic to address socio-economic challenges and demographic development?

- *The EU should support Norwegian district policy, and allow national stimulus measures to ensure recruitment to sparsely populated areas in the Arctic. This applies to both lower taxes, write-offs of student loans, and other national compensatory measures for increased expenses of those living in the Arctic.*
- *The EU should allow Norway to open up for more labor immigration from North-West Russia within the Barents Euro Arctic Region. In the EFC area, people have from time immemorial interacted with neighbors in the North West of Russia.*
- *It is necessary for the EU, through strategic planning, to become more specific on local terms in order to develop our area of the Arctic.*

7. How could intergovernmental and regional cooperation in the Arctic be improved for the benefit of the Arctic region and what should the EU's role be in this?

- *The Scandinavian regional cooperation in the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian Arctic through Nordkalottrådet have to be developed through modernization of the regulations for cooperation, see point 1 above.*
 - *The EU should ensure that the Scandinavian regional cooperation in the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian Arctic through Nordkalottrådet becomes so integrated that f.ex police can assist in maintaining law and order across national borders in the EFC region.*
 - *The four freedoms in EU/EEA should be introduced throughout the Barents Euro Arctic region, see point 5 above.*
 - *Visa requirements in the Barents Euro Arctic Region should be mitigated and simplified. From the Norwegian side (Schengen), the same electronic visa procedures for travelers from Russia to Norway should be introduced that Russia has introduced for travelers to Russia. From the Norwegian side (Schengen), a 72-hour charter visa should also be allowed for travelers within the Barents Euro Arctic region by both bus and cruise boat. Today, this applies unilaterally to passengers on cruise ships to selected ports in Russia. In any case, the visa-free regime for border residents should be introduced for residents in Eastern Finnmark who have interacted with neighbors in North-West Russia since time immemorial.*
 - *The International Barents Secretariat in Kirkenes ("BEAC") should be developed into an International Governmental Organization in the Barents Region (IGO) and be given the power to make decisions on cross-border cooperation in the Barents Euro Arctic Region, which do not have such content that they have to be approved by national foreign affairs authorities. The EU should be a member of such an IGO.*
 - *The EU, through an IGO mentioned in the previous paragraph, should open up procedures for standardization and identification of "best practices" that will strengthen business-to-business interaction in the Barents Euro Arctic Region. This will strengthen the business community in the EFC area.*
8. **How can the impact of EU science and technology/research and innovation efforts be further enhanced, as a means of supporting the priorities of the EU's Arctic Policy? To what extent can EU engagement in science and technology/research and innovation be strengthened, for the benefit of the Arctic region?**
- *The EU should support research institutions in East Finnmark.*
 - *The EU should offer vocational education programs to upper secondary schools and student programs in East Finnmark.*

Vadsø./Nesseby. 10 November 2020

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