North Norway and the EU’s Arctic Policy

February 2014

The North Norway European Office, on behalf of the three northernmost counties of Norway, would like to put forward some points of particular importance to the EU’s Arctic policy.

At the outset, we would like to emphasise that the European Arctic is very different from the North American, Greenlandic or Asian Arctic in terms of climate, population, infrastructure, industrial activity and GDP per capita. Almost half a million people inhabit North Norway alone, representing 10% of the total Norwegian population. The European Arctic region spans from modern cities, world leading research institutions and advanced industry, to rural areas and indigenous people’s communities.

In North Norway, industrial activity and regional development is conducted in accordance with the precautionary principle, with the highest regard for environmental safety and the society at large, and in line with EU goals regarding climate and emissions. This responsible presence is crucial for Europe as a whole in terms of managing natural resources like hydrocarbons, fish stocks and minerals, and fostering a balanced and practical approach towards North-West Russia. There is potential for further sustainable growth of energy intensive industry in the Arctic, based on mineral and energy resources.

We would therefore like to put forward the following points:

- The European Union’s policy for the Arctic should place particular emphasis on the European part of the Arctic, a region that spans industrialised societies and indigenous communities. Involving these regions in the future development of an EU Arctic policy is integral to ensuring legitimacy and local support of the EU’s Arctic engagement.

- Dialogue with the regional political and administrative level in the European Arctic should therefore be essential to the EU for developing legitimacy and establishing itself as an Arctic actor. We suggest that the EU works towards creating a forum where regional, local and indigenous stakeholders can interact with the EU-level on Arctic topics.

- For the European Arctic that falls under the European Economic Area (North Sweden, North Finland, North Norway, Iceland) it is imperative that new State Aid Guidelines continue to enable regions in the North with special characteristics and challenges to use appropriate mechanisms to foster innovation and growth.

- It is essential that the European Union continues to focus on transport corridors, in terms of maritime shipping, roads, and railroads to maintain and promote cross-border links in the European Arctic and to bring goods from the High North to the European markets. Specialised products, raw materials and fish are just some of the goods that Europe relies upon. The Barents Transport Plan highlights the potential for new regional opportunities through infrastructure. The Finnish initiatives on new railway lines from Rovaniemi serves as an example. As the EU develops its transport infrastructure network (TEN-T) further, the link to the European Arctic region needs to be improved, as with the inclusion of the corridor from Luleå to Narvik in the Core Network of TEN-T.

- We recognise and welcome EU mechanisms that target regional and local development in the European Arctic. Regional cooperation programs for the Arctic are one of the EU’s essential tools in supporting sustainable Arctic development and should be strengthened. We also support an initiative recently launched under the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme to establish a coordinating mechanism for regional development programs in the Arctic, located in Tromsø, North Norway.
• Oil and gas activities in the European Arctic have been underway for decades, and the area serves as an important and stable energy supplier to the European market. The activities are conducted with the utmost focus on safety and sustainability, contributing to growth in the region. However, as maritime traffic and petroleum activities increase along the Arctic coast, developing regional and international competence centres for safety and preparedness based within the region will prove essential. Bodø is the safety and emergency capital in the north, in collaboration with other communities. The EU can play a significant role, contributing to the development and financing of centres and activities in the High North.

• Research institutions in the High North are world leading in polar research, and welcomes EU focus on more knowledge of the Arctic and Blue Growth within the Horizon2020 programme and the Blue Growth strategy. It is important that this focus on Arctic competence is geared towards concrete results and innovation, and does not solely look at climate change and ice conditions, but also on cultural, societal and technological development. The European Arctic has some of the leading international institutions on satellite monitoring and surveillance. Still, increasing activity implies a need to further develop monitoring and observational systems that provide reliable information about the changing conditions in the Arctic.

• Seafood and aquaculture constitute important industries for inhabitants in the Arctic, and play a strong role in ensuring economic growth in the Arctic communities. Norwegian management of fisheries is regarded as an example of best practice, and experiences from the successful cooperation with neighbouring states ought to be used in future development in the Arctic.

• Through the Barents Cooperation, northern Norway together with northern Finland, Sweden and northwest Russia enjoy a close and longstanding co-operation both on a national, but more importantly on a regional level. The Norwegian Barents Secretariat has in that regard been instrumental in promoting an «esprit de corps» between northern Norway and its eastern neighboring regions in the Russian Federation.

• The EU should work to get the mandatory Polar Codes under IMO adopted and ratified as soon as possible.