NSPA Steering Committee
/30 October 2026

NSPA
Northern Sparsely Populated Areas

Northern Sparsely Populated Areas welcome the new EU Arctic Strategy
– A first statement from the EU´s own Arctic partner-regions.

The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas network, NSPA, represents the interests of the four northernmost 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).

The network of Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) welcomes the new EU Arctic Strategy adopted by the European Commission on October 20. The strategy provides a comprehensive framework for the EU's engagement in the Arctic. The NSPA take note of the focus on security and the EU's engagement for the northern neighbourhood. Against the backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions affecting the northernmost areas and Europe as a whole, the NSPA embrace these perspectives and will be an active partner to help build Arctic partnerships that support a peaceful and resilient Arctic.

For the Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian NSPA regions, it is particularly important that the EU recognises its own European Arctic. Sweden and Finland are EU members and Norway is part of the European Economic Area (EEA). The northern Nordic region is therefore not merely the EU's external Arctic neighbourhood: it is a part of the European single market and a bridge to the larger Arctic, giving legitimacy for the EU's global Arctic interests. It is important to assure this special status.

The NSPA will continue to be an active and contributing partner to the EU in the Arctic, in the core of EU's strive for strategic autonomy and a secure northern outpost vis-à-vis the geopolitical landscape to address, to which also the climate challenges highlighted in the strategy can be added. We therefore welcome the continued reference to the NSPA in the strategy to develop this partnership.

We particularly welcome that the strategy's recognition of the need to investments in the EU´s own Arctic regions, such as utilising the EU cohesion policy instruments. These instruments make a difference for the NSPA regions and are essential to building capacity for sustainable development and, furthermore, collaboration across regional and national borders. We also welcome the strategy's attention to supporting vulnerable Arctic communities, including the indigenous peoples. Strong local capacity is essential if powerful externally interests are not to create local conflict.

The NSPA endorse the ambitions to promote dual-use investments that strengthen resilience and preparedness while also supporting sustainable development and competitiveness that can leverage more investments in the European Arctic and Arctic as a whole. The ambition to strengthen connectivity via digital connections and transport infrastructure, including in relation to NATO's Arctic planning and emerging new trade and commuting routes, is especially important, as well as many of the other in the strategy pointed out and for the EU important investments in the Arctic.

A broad understanding of Arctic and the European Arctic geography that is reflected in the strategy, is necessary for a coherent policy framework, also aligned with the NATO and other relevant Arctic cooperation platforms. The European Arctic is a vast and remote, but interconnected and politically integrated, northern border area for the EU, stretching from the North Atlantic across the northern Baltic Sea and its connected land area. It needs to be comprehensively dealt with by the EU.

The central message of the new strategy is the EU's stronger engagement with the people and communities of the Arctic as its primary stakeholders. This entails both a responsibility and commitment on which to build. It is the essential foundation for the EU's high set ambitions to create a common neighbourhood of like-minded partners with shared values and joint actions.

The Arctic is under pressure, but the Arctic do also hold major potentials. The NSPA is ready to engage as a true and close partner of the EU in the European north to make the ambitions come true.

/Adopted at the NSPA Steering Committee meeting on 30th October 2026 in Tornio, Finland.