

The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) Political Statement Summary

This is a summary of the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas' political statement on the framework of the future EU Cohesion Policy.

The NSPA is a strong, specific and promising region. The NSPA is an important part of the EU, most notably due to the large amount of natural resources, advanced research institutions and high performance process industries found in the area. However, the NSPA is at the same time a peripheral and sparsely populated region with long distances to the European markets. The importance of the structural funds for development and cooperation in the NSPA underlines the importance that the EU together with the regions in the NSPA, discuss common policies that include these obstacles, in order to face the future global challenges for development stated below.

The NSPA stress the need to further develop the territorial cohesion and territorial cooperation as a part of the future cohesion policy. The NSPA strongly supports the future cohesion policy and the availability of structural funds that are offered to all regions in all EU member states. The NSPA welcomes the EU policy of strengthening the territorial cohesion with a multi level governance for a sustainable development of all parts of the European Union.

It is vitally important to continue focus on areas defined by geographical characteristics. Such regions, for example, that consists of geographically and demographically exposed regions like the NSPA with sparsely populated areas and long distances. These regions have a legal base in Protocol 6 of the Accession Treaty for Sweden, Finland and Austria, and article 174 of the Lisbon Treaty. It has been proved that earlier and ongoing programming periods have had a positive impact on NSPA's regional development and interregional cooperation.

The NSPA believes that the need for particular actions indicated by Protocol 6 and article 174 respectively should direct the incorporation of the NSPA in the discussions concerning the development of new cohesion policies and programmes as well as cross-border, interregional cooperation, the Baltic Sea strategy and cooperation along the external borders of the EU.

1. The Vision 2020+ of the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) with added value for the entire Europe

This is our shared vision for the future of the NSPA:

- The NSPA is a grouping of dynamic and modern regions with a diversified economic profiles and with functional labour markets. Enterprises are highly competitive and at the forefront of developing green technology making a globally important contribution to sustainable development
- The NSPA offers attractive living conditions for women and men of all origins, as well as world class higher education opportunities
- The NSPA is truly internationally oriented and provides Europe with significant added value

NSPA provides added value for the entire Europe:

- by contributing to the climate change strategy of the European Union the NSPA provide an expanding forest area necessary for the capture of CO₂ and for the development and exploitation of renewable energy resources. The NSPA has potential to further contribute to the global reduction of green-house gases and the securing of European energy supply. The importance of fighting climate change is internalized in all NSPA policies suggested in this position paper.
- by presenting innovative solutions and sharing good practices for the development and the service provision of sparsely populated, rural and peripheral regions across Europe, for example in the fields of e-health, e-learning, e-business, e-governance and new working methods
- by exploiting the vast natural resources of these northern regions such as oil, gas, wood, fish and minerals

- by providing an excellent access for the European Union to the resource rich Barents Region.
- by sharing the long external border line with the Russian Federation and thus the long tradition of partnership in the cross-border cooperation with North-West Russia including St. Petersburg Region
- by providing excellent universities and education as well as strengthening know-how
- by providing unique natural environment and cultural heritage for recreation and tourism in cooperation with the last indigenous people in Europe - Sami people

2. The NSPA – an active partner for European policies

The NSPA position paper shows the need of economic and political tools for unlocking its strong potential and facilitating regional development and cross-border cooperation in the NSPA. An increased connectivity with the rest of the world and improved functionality within and between regions are essential for the future development of the area.

Better funding and frameworks for research is needed in order to strengthen the NSPA knowledge economy and innovative environments as well as for the development of green technology and ICT solutions. If the adequate support is provided, the NSPA natural resources, knowledge and technology can play a decisive role in the creation of a knowledge driven economy and a low-carbon society. Further, more support for diversifying the NSPA economy is essential for creating a more competitive and robust regional economy that offers more attractive living conditions, security and jobs.

In the NSPA, it is possible to trigger extensive opportunities for economic and social development through well targeted political efforts focusing on some key obstacles. There is therefore a particularly fertile ground for European policies targeting competitiveness and employment in these regions.

The existing programmes such as Objective 2 and Interreg programmes have been crucial factors in the development and cooperation within the area. The NSPA needs that kind of tools also in the future. The NSPA is the European interface to the Arctic and to North-West Russia. Measures implemented in these regions in the context of interregional/international cooperation and as part of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument will have a large leverage effect in these strategically important areas by building by the local knowledge and networks of local actors.

3. Policy measures for regional development of the NSPA

Within the framework of European Union Cohesion Policy the NSPA regions would:

Stimulate the NSPA's global competitiveness through:

- supporting activities that increase the value added in the NSPA from natural resources located in the region
- supporting a job policy that increase the number of employees in the NSPA related to the service sector, the cultural/creative industries and the RDI sector
- developing the potential of the NSPA natural resources, knowledge and technology for the global transformation into a low-carbon and eco-effective economy
- creating substantial revolving funds from EU funding to ensure venture capital in the NSPA
- through effective support systems for SMEs
- providing funding to NSPA Universities and Centres of Excellence as an important feature of strengthening the EU knowledge economy and developing green technology
- encouraging international R&D projects in the NSPA by creating economic incentives to locate the projects within the region and developing cooperation networks between NSPA universities/centres of excellences within and beyond the NSPA
- exploiting the NSPA geographic position next to the Russian border and the Arctic area and secure effective east-west as well as south-north infrastructural systems within the NSPA and between the area and the surrounding world

Stimulate the NSPA's demographic development through:

- investing in effective infrastructure connecting the NSPA to central markets as well as enhancing interregional functionality within the NSPA
- enhancing the possibilities of developing functionality within the NSPA and delivering services in sparsely populated areas e.g. through ICT solutions
- supporting a job oriented policy particular addressed to the service oriented sectors of the NSPA economy
- stimulating new innovative approaches to how long term employment and economic activity is created in sparsely populated regions
- enabling settlement strategies to identify the specific potential of the NSPA's rural and urban societies with respect to regional functionality and issues regarding gender, age, security and cultural background

Stimulate an effective use of energy and energy assets in the NSPA and by that mitigating the climate change through:

- strengthening the role given to regional stakeholders in the NSPA regarding design and implementation of policies surrounding the exploitation of natural resources
- innovation policies that support the development of green technology, renewable energy sources and environmental techniques
- supporting transformations of the transport infrastructure into a system based on more eco-friendly transportation and connecting the internal NSPA infrastructure system with the EU green corridors
- improving the design of energy grids for increased internal use of energy in the NSPA
- enabling an effective use of NSPA energy assets

The NSPA is looking forward to participate and to give input to the future debate on EU Regional Policy including Territorial Cohesion. The NSPA appreciates the fruitful cooperation with EU-institutions and wants to be a strong, specific and promising partner for developing European policies.

To find further information and to download the report "Strong, Specific and Promising – Towards a Vision for the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas in 2020" visit www.nspa-network.eu

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