

# The EU Arctic Policy revision

## Perspectives from NSPA

Janni Ekrem, advisor, North Norway European Office

Jonas Andersson, Chair of the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) network



# Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA)



- 14 Arctic regions across Finland, Sweden and Norway
- Roots in EU Accession Treaties in 1994
- Share unique structural characteristics
- Cooperation to raise awareness of the region in the EU institutions, to influence EU policy and provide a platform for best practice
- Eligibility for additional regional allocations under EU Cohesion Policy
- Flexibility and targeted measures within EU Structural Funds

# THE EU IN THE ARCTIC



Funded by  
the European Union

## Why does the EU have an Arctic policy?

The EU is an Arctic actor

- Arctic EU Member States: **Finland, Sweden, Denmark/Greenland**
- Close cooperation with **Norway** and **Iceland**
- EU policies shape Arctic development

Three reasons for EU engagement

 **Climate and environment**

The Arctic is critical for the global climate system

 **Economic and strategic importance**

Energy, resources, transport, research and innovation

 **People and communities**

The European Arctic is a **living region**, not an empty space

EU Arctic policy since 2008




# THE EU IN THE ARCTIC



Funded by  
the European Union

## Current EU Arctic Policy (2021)

- A safe, sustainable, peaceful and prosperous Arctic

-  Protecting the Arctic environment and climate
-  Promoting sustainable development
-  Strengthening international cooperation

# EU ACTIONS IN THE ARCTIC

From northern Sweden and Finland to the wider European Arctic and the pan-Arctic region, the EU maintains a strong, active presence across the Arctic.

**€1.6 billion** provided by the European Investment Bank between 1994 and 2023 to foster the **development of renewable energy and green transition projects**, including a battery cell plant in Northern Sweden.

**€372 million** provided for **Arctic research and innovation** under Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe (until mid-2024) programmes, in addition to projects covering both poles.

**€273 million** Interreg Northern Periphery & Arctic and Aurora programmes (2021-2027) invest €273 million in the **Arctic cooperation projects** focused on sustainable development, climate change, innovation, SMEs, culture, mobility, education, and cross-border governance.

**€225 million** for 2021-2027 to **support education and green growth activities** in Greenland, funded by the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe.

**2019-2022**  **11,000 people** from the Arctic participated in the Erasmus+ programme, with **26,800 persons** going to the Arctic.

**Arctic Urban Regional Cooperation** A **first urban regional network**, bringing together local representatives to exchange good practices and foster peer discussions, was launched in 2024, with a budget of up to **€2 million**.

**Copernicus Arctic Hub** A **one-stop-shop** of Arctic-driven Earth observation for policy users around the world to support science, research, innovation, economic development, urban planning, etc.

**Science Diplomacy Networks** The EU supports Arctic science diplomacy via the All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA) and the Arctic Science Ministerial meetings.



The **Union Civil Protection Mechanism** coordinates disaster prevention, preparedness and response activities of EU countries and 10 participating states, including Iceland and Norway, and can be activated for emergencies by any Arctic country.

## EU in the Arctic through the years

First EU Arctic policy

EU Arctic policy update

EU Arctic Forum in Brussels, Belgium

Launch of the EU-Arctic Youth

Opening of the European

## The EU in the geopolitical Arctic

In addition to its Arctic presence through its northernmost regions, the EU has a strong political and diplomatic presence in the Arctic, which includes European Commission Representations and EU Delegations in all Arctic States, including an Office in Greenland. The EU is a de facto Observer in the Arctic Council, and six EU Member States (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain) are full Observers.



6

EU Member States are Observers in the Arctic Council



3

EU Member States are Arctic States



Between 2016 and 2023, around **25,000 publications**

 on Arctic topics were co-/authored by scholars based in EU Member States



# Why is the policy being revised now?

Three main developments since 2021

## 1. Climate change accelerating

- Arctic warming 4× faster than global average
- Melting ice, thawing permafrost, pressure on ecosystems

## 2. Changing geopolitical context

- Security landscape changed after Russia's war in Ukraine
- Growing focus on resilience and preparedness in the North

## 3. Increasing strategic importance

- Green transition
- Renewable energy
- Critical raw materials
- Emerging green industries

# **Why this matter for Northern regions**

- Increasing EU attention to the Arctic
- Strategic role in the green transition
- Growing importance of Arctic infrastructure
- Need for strong regional voices

# Our contribution to the revision of the EU Arctic Policy



# What the NSPA ask from the updated EU Arctic Policy

## Three pillars for the future

- Security
- Sustainability
- Prosperity

## Key priorities

- Strong regional development policy
- Investment in Arctic connectivity
- Support for innovation ecosystems
- Meaningful regional and Indigenous participation



Thank you!

