CPMR BSC Arctic Task Force views on the Joint Communication: “A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable & prosperous Arctic”

Approved by the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission Executive Committee, 8 March 2022

The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission (BSC) Arctic Task Force welcomes the European Commission and European External Action Service’s (EEAS) Joint Communication on the EU Arctic Policy published on 13 October 2021.

CPMR BSC Member Regions embrace the EU’s commitment to reinforce its role in Arctic matters, as set out in the Communication, with concrete actions to ensure a peaceful, sustainable, and prosperous Arctic. In particular, the CPMR BSC Arctic Task Force welcomes the growing role of the EU in Arctic matters through its support to the “sustainable development of the Arctic regions to the benefit of its inhabitants and future generations, focusing on the needs of Indigenous Peoples, women and the young, and investing in future-orientated jobs and the blue economy” (pillar 3). This pillar is a prerequisite for the successful delivery of the other two pillars, namely tackling the ecological, social, economic, and political challenges arising as a consequence of climate change as well as maintaining the Arctic as a peaceful area.

In that perspective, the European Arctic regions located in the Baltic Sea area, are the stepping stones for a sustainable, climate smart and low-tension collaborative development in the Arctic and the world around.

In view of the implementation phase of the new EU Arctic Policy, the CPMR BSC Arctic Task Force calls on the EU institutions to take into consideration the following recommendations.

AN EU ARCTIC POLICY BASED ON TERRITORIAL STRENGTHS

❖ The sustainable development of the Arctic must be based on territorial strengths and a shared vision with local communities, businesses, universities, public authorities, and Arctic stakeholders to ensure tailor-made policies, addressing specific Arctic challenges and triggering full development potential.

❖ It is crucial to recognise the potential of the green transition and green growth in the European Arctic, based on territorial strengths, comparative advantages, the unique know-how of its people, innovative businesses, natural resources such as renewable energy, forestry, and minerals. The European Arctic has resources that contribute to the green transition of the EU.

❖ The European Arctic needs an enhanced focus on its people, social well-being, education, and culture. Investments in human capital are needed to create sustainable and attractive societies. In that respect, EU Cohesion Policy programmes, such as the European Social Fund+, are important tools to create resilient Arctic societies.
KEY MESSAGES

We call on EU institutions to offer stronger support to clean energy technologies, forestry, sustainable extraction, and innovative solutions in the Arctic to contribute to the realisation of the Green Deal.

We call on EU institutions to recognise and address the demographic challenges inherent to the Arctic. EU Cohesion Policy programmes, such as the European Social Fund+, are important tools to create resilient Arctic societies and to attract people to live in the Arctic, and thus ensure a sustainable social development.

MAINSTREAMING THE ARCTIC WITHIN THE EU AGENDA AND RELEVANT EU POLICIES

❖ Arctic issues surpass the countries, the territories, and the people who live within the Arctic circle. The Arctic has a very clear European and global dimension. Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness about Arctic opportunities and challenges at European level and hence include more Arctic aspects in all EU policies.

❖ In light of the military attack and invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the BSC Arctic Task Force reiterates the importance to keep peace in Europe, including in the European Arctic. Maintaining the Arctic as a low-tension area is essential, and therefore the BSC Arctic Task Force calls on the European Union, in the framework of its revised Arctic Policy, to increase its presence in the Arctic through investments for sustainable development, as well as to encourage more people-to-people, research-to-research and business-to-business cooperation. The geopolitical situation requires all efforts to promote further multi-level cooperation and interregional cooperation to safeguard a safe living environment.

❖ The deployment of the Recovery and Resilience Facility until 2026 represents a major source of financing and opportunity for Arctic Regions to recover from the crisis and to make them more sustainable, resilient, and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.

❖ The publication of a new EU Arctic Policy, at the same time as the start of a new EU programming period 2021-2027, represents a major opportunity to implement the policy successfully. Strategies on how to use the new EU funding instruments, and programmes in the Arctic should be adapted to specific territorial Arctic needs (from Cohesion Policy to Horizon Europe, LIFE+ and CEF), and must start with local and regional stakeholders, in close cooperation with EU institutions.

❖ The development of sustainable transport modes and infrastructures, effective connections, and ICT networks, is an essential condition to further connect the Arctic with the rest of the EU. It will enable exchange of goods, services and knowledge between the European Arctic and the wider European market, contributing to jobs and growth in the EU. The current revision of the TEN-T regulation is an opportunity to reinforce territorial accessibility and connectivity in the Arctic, and therefore the CPMR BSC Arctic Task Force calls on the Member States to take into consideration the CPMR BSC policy recommendations on TEN-T available here.

❖ The strengthening of a sustainable blue economy in the Arctic has important social and economic aspects for coastal communities and must be further promoted, such as coastal tourism, sustainable fishing, blue bioeconomy, Arctic ports as hubs of blue and green transition etc.

❖ The support to green bio-economy and sustainable forestry, accompanied by the sustainable mining and renewable energy industries, must be part of the increased EU involvement in the Arctic. Indeed, large parts of the Arctic, especially the European Arctic, consist of forests that build a vital part of the local and regional and also national economies in the Arctic area. It furthermore delivers a bio-based value-chain and innovation eco-system that form solutions for green growth and smart climate actions, as a part of the EU Green Deal.
The EU support to research and innovation related to the Arctic, through programmes such as Horizon 2020, is essential to promote the sustainable development of the Arctic. The BSC Arctic Task Force emphasises the importance of applying a broad scope of Arctic research, understood as all research activities that contribute to sustainable development and the benefits of the people of the Arctic, and not only Polar research. The establishment of a Baltic Sea Region innovation ecosystem, based on smart specialisation strategies should benefit the regional development of the EU Arctic and be seen as potential to exploit further innovation and cooperation opportunities.

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We call on the European Commission to ensure that the national Recovery and Resilience Plans submitted by EU Member States support the ambition of the EU Arctic Policy.

We call on the current and future Council presidencies, especially the Swedish Presidency (January-July 2023) to promote Arctic issues high on the European agenda and be an active partner for cooperation.

We call on the TEN-T Regulation to reflect the ambition of the EU Arctic Policy and to include major strategic routes and links to increase the territorial accessibility of the Arctic and to connect the Arctic to the rest of the EU, as mentioned in the CPMR BSC Policy Position on TEN-T.

We call on the EU decision-makers to recognise and support the key role of the green bio-economy in the sustainable development of the European Arctic.

REGIONS AT THE CENTRE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU ARCTIC POLICY

Successful implementation of the EU Arctic Policy will rely on meaningful involvement from Arctic Regions. All the various Arctic fora, including the EU Arctic Forum, are important platforms for exchange that need to be further continued. The CPMR BSC Arctic Task Force Members stand ready to deepen dialogue and cooperation with the EU institutions and other stakeholders.

The further promotion of interregional cooperation and constructive dialogue between (Arctic and non-Arctic) regions are essential to tackle joint challenges in a coordinated manner, but also to seize development opportunities for the European Arctic, and the EU overall. The CPMR BSC Arctic Task Force serves as a platform for increased cooperation between Arctic and non-Arctic regions. Furthermore, Interreg programmes have a particularly important role to play in that sense.

A prosperous Arctic will benefit the Baltic Sea Region since a substantial part of the European Arctic is part of the Baltic Sea Region, but it will also benefit the development of the EU overall. The adoption in 2021 of both a new Action Plan for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and a new EU Arctic Policy is an opportunity to address common challenges in the Baltic Sea Region and the Arctic area, as well as reinforce their mutual development. Regional Authorities that are part of the Baltic Sea area and the European Arctic have a pivotal role to play to promote transnational cooperation. The EUSBSR Annual Forum and the EU Arctic Forum are important fora to raise synergies between Arctic and BSR issues.

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We call on the European Commission to consider the creation of an Advisory Forum which would be tasked to oversee the implementation of the EU Arctic Policy. The Forum would gather key stakeholders, including Regional Authorities.

We invite EU and national representatives to increase multi-level dialogue in the framework of the newly created “Arctic” portfolio within the Intergroup on Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas (SEArica) of the European Parliament, chaired by MEP Erik Bergkvist.
We call for further cooperation with and between intergovernmental organisations such as the Arctic Council, Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the Council of Baltic Sea States.

We call for further synergies between the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme, with the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme and the newly established Interreg Aurora.