

E U R O P E A N E C O N O M I C A R E A
FORUM OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Ref: 14-130716

NINTH MEETING OF THE EEA EFTA FORUM

Grímsnes- og Grafningshreppur

26-27 June 2014

**Opinion on the opportunities and challenges for local and regional
authorities in a changing Arctic**

Rapporteur: Geir Kr. Aðalsteinsson

The EEA EFTA Forum of Local and Regional Authorities:

- A. Having regard to the European Union's increased engagement in the Arctic; the Joint Communication of the Commission and the High Representative of June 2012 on Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic, the European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2014 on the EU strategy for the Arctic and Council conclusions on developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region of 12 May 2014;
- B. Having regard to the Resolution of the Consultative Committee of the European Economic Area on the opportunities and challenges in a changing Arctic region of 10 October 2013 and of the position of the North Norway European Office on a EU Arctic policy of February 2014;
- C. Emphasising the key role played by local and regional authorities in environmental protection, spatial planning, disaster management, regional development and the operation and financing of ports;
- D. Noting the reinforced subsidiarity principle set out in the Lisbon Treaty and its explicit reference to the local and regional dimension and self-government;
- E. Noting the proportionality principle as laid down in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
- F. Acknowledging the impact of European Union law on local and regional authorities in the EEA EFTA States through the EEA Agreement, in particular the state aid legislation and the set of guidelines developed on its interpretation;
- G. Noting the role of the Forum as a body in the EFTA structure:
 - 1. Welcomes the European Union's increased engagement in the Arctic and the three main policy objectives: focus on protecting and preserving the Arctic in unison with its population; promoting the sustainable use of resources; and international cooperation;

2. Welcomes the EU's focus on knowledge of the Arctic and Blue Growth within Horizon 2020 and the Blue Growth strategy but underlines that action should also be taken towards concrete results and innovation. Analysis and action should be expanded from focus on climate change and ice conditions to include also cultural, societal and technological development. It is important to develop infrastructure, including social infrastructure in scarcely populated areas, and technology adapted to the harsh climate and conditions in the area;
3. Welcomes the expansion of the Northern Periphery Programme to the Arctic regions. This can foster closer cooperation between municipalities/regions and the EEA/EFTA countries and counterparts in third countries in the Arctic regions in order to address social and environmental changes arising with a climate change and a changing Arctic;
4. Supports the European Union's continued 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 ensure transport to the European markets. Further, recommends that the Connecting Europe Facility, TEN-T should be extended to the Arctic;
5. Underlines the economic and social potential sustainable development in the Arctic can bring in terms of growth and jobs, e.g. related to material extraction and new maritime transport routes;
6. Draws attention to the fact 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. Half a million people inhabit North Norway alone; 10% of the total population thus living above the Arctic Circle;
7. Asks the European Commission to ensure that state aid guidelines continue to enable regions in the North with special characteristics and challenges, and which are part of the EEA (North Sweden, North Finland, North Norway, Iceland), to use appropriate mechanisms to foster innovation and growth;
8. Draws attention to the fact that climate change and pollution can also negatively impact the fish stocks that many of these communities build their economies on. Increased activity and shipping traffic brings threats of environmental accidents which can directly affect the coastal communities. Consequently, developing regional and international competence centres for safety and preparedness based within the European Arctic region will be essential;
9. Stresses the importance of sustainable use of resources, environmental protection and consideration of indigenous peoples rights, traditional livelihood and cultural heritage in all Arctic development;
10. Emphasises that there is major potential for renewable energy production in the Arctic and encourages the EEA Member States to support such efforts through research and development projects;
11. Stresses the importance of cooperation and calls for consultation with local and regional authorities in the formulation and implementation of all strategies for

development of the Arctic region, as the competent authorities and in line with the principle of subsidiarity, also through greater local and regional involvement in the Arctic Council. Such interaction, will ensure legitimacy and local support;

12. Asks the EFTA Ministers and the European Commission to take into account the opinion of the Forum in future discussions on the Arctic.