

EURO-ARCTIC POLICY BRIEF

For National Ministries and EU Institutions

Euro-Arctic Cooperation in Transition: From Reaction to Action

First Euro-Arctic Assembly, 12–13 November 2025, Bodø (Norway)

Summary

The Euro-Arctic is entering a new strategic era shaped by geopolitical tension, NATO enlargement, climate acceleration, and demographic decline. These shifts sharpen the importance of societal resilience under NATO Article 3 and increase demands on **civil preparedness, critical infrastructure protection, and cross-border coordination**.

The core message from the Euro-Arctic Assembly 2025 is that **regional and local actors must be empowered as operational partners** in national and EU resilience strategies. Existing cooperation frameworks are still too fragmented, too project-dependent and insufficiently aligned with national and EU processes. This brief answers two questions:

- **What does the region need?**
 - **How can national governments and EU institutions better support these needs?**
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Actions

1. Why the Euro-Arctic Matters for National and EU-Level Policymaking

- The Euro-Arctic is a **frontline region for NATO Article 3**: societal resilience, civil preparedness and protection of critical infrastructure depend on well-functioning regional and cross-border cooperation.
 - **Finland and Sweden's NATO accession**, combined with the long-term consequences of war in Ukraine, has fundamentally changed the strategic context in the North.
 - **Climate change**, occurring up to 4–5 times faster than the global average in parts of the Arctic, directly affects transport, energy, emergency response and community viability.
 - The region faces **structural challenges**- demographic decline, ageing populations, overstretched local and regional administrations, long distances, uneven infrastructure and weak east–west connectivity- which cannot be addressed through national measures alone.
 - The Euro-Arctic offers **“Nordic Gold”** in the form of high trust, longstanding cross-border cooperation and strong societal ties; these are operational assets for both national capitals and EU institutions.
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2. What National Ministries and EU Institutions Need to Know

- Regional and local administrations often **lack the administrative capacity and stable funding** needed to prioritise international and cross-border cooperation, even when they see it as essential.

- Cooperation structures exist, but practice is still **too fragmented and project-based**, heavily dependent on political cycles and individual initiatives.
 - There is **no shared, cross-border understanding of goals, priorities and responsibilities**, which weakens implementation of national and EU strategies on the ground.
 - **Youth and Indigenous involvement** increase legitimacy and continuity of cross-border cooperation, and their participation must be embedded structurally for long-term sustainability and credibility.
 - **Nordics' policies and strategies documents** stress “safe and thriving local communities”, a goal the EU explicitly supports.
 - **National co-financing is currently too low**, making it hard for universities, municipalities and civil society to participate in cross-border cooperation; ministries cannot request higher budgets directly, and **regional authorities must communicate this need to Parliament**.
 - **OECD analyses** confirm the same pattern of challenges identified at the Assembly: institutional fragmentation, governance gaps and uneven territorial development in European Arctic and cross-border regions.
 - **Nordic and EU policy documents** increasingly emphasise on three priorities—cross-border cooperation, civil preparedness, and resilient local communities—creating a shared policy direction that **regional actors can operationalise**.
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3. How National Governments Can Better Support Regional Actors

National governments are key enablers. They are not expected to “do the work for the region,” but to **support those who do**. They can strengthen Euro-Arctic resilience by supporting regional actors in the following ways:

- **Provide predictable, long-term financing** and co-financing for cross-border cooperation, enabling regional and local administrations to plan beyond individual projects and initiatives.
 - **Increase national co-financing** (based on regional input and parliamentary dialogue) so that key regional stakeholders—especially local and regional authorities, universities and civil society—can participate in cross-border initiatives.
 - Support **administrative capacity at regional and local levels**, so that international and cross-border cooperation can be prioritised alongside statutory tasks.
 - Create and maintain **structured arenas for multi-level coordination**, where regional actors, national authorities and relevant **stakeholders** jointly discuss Euro-Arctic priorities, risks and investment needs.
 - Ensure that national civil security and preparedness systems include **regular civil-level dialogue with regional and local actors** on hybrid threats, critical infrastructure and societal resilience.
 - Align national High North / Arctic policies with regional priorities by **systematically integrating regional input** when updating strategies, white papers and budget lines.
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4. How EU Institutions Can Better Support Regional Actors

EU institutions can play a decisive role in stabilising and scaling cooperation that regions are already driving:

- **Protect and strengthen cross-border funding instruments** with flexibility adapted to Euro-Arctic conditions: long distances, low population density and higher costs.
- Treat **east–west connectivity and infrastructure** as a strategic backbone for security, mobility and green transition, and prioritise Euro-Arctic projects in relevant transport, digital and energy programmes.
- Ensure that the **revision of the EU Arctic Strategy and related action plans** systematically incorporates regional perspectives and uses existing regional platforms (such as NSPA, CPMR, Barents Regional Council, North Calotte Council, regional offices in Brussels) as standing consultation partners.
- Support **joint regional initiatives on comprehensive security and preparedness**, including cross-border exercises, shared situational awareness tools, and knowledge-sharing related to NATO Article 3.
- Promote **cross-border labour and education mobility** in the Euro-Arctic through targeted calls, pilot schemes for joint vocational modules, and efforts to reduce regulatory barriers.
- Encourage EU agencies and programmes working on climate, environment, migration and security to **treat the Euro-Arctic as a populated region with communities and economic activity**.

Core Takeaway for National and EU Policymakers

The Euro-Arctic Assembly 2025 delivered a clear message: **regional actors are ready to lead**, but they cannot do it alone. **No one else will “do the work for the region”**. Regional actors are ready to strengthen Europe’s northern resilience, but they require **predictable long-term financing, administrative capacity and coherent frameworks** from national and EU levels to do so effectively.

If **stronger multi-level and multi-national coordination** is in place, the Euro-Arctic can move **from reaction to action** and consolidate its role as a **stable, strategic, and forward-looking part of Europe** in an era of geopolitical uncertainty and rapid change.

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