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Input – Revision of the EU’s Arctic strategy

The West Finnmark Council represents seven coastal municipalities and 55% of Finnmark’s population - communities that carry Norway’s Arctic presence. We stand where global powers direct their gaze. Our message is simple: The new Arctic strategy must be shaped with us, not over our heads. Our region is no longer distant - we are at the center of great-power attention.

The Arctic has become a geopolitical focal point, where strategic interests, northern sea routes, and natural resources make the region a center of power. Initiatives are coming. Change is coming. The question is whether the EU intends to be an active participant - or merely a spectator.

And we ask: *Who should own the history of the Arctic? Who should be allowed to define our future?*

Today, we highlight three guiding principles for the development of the EU’s Arctic strategy.

Guiding Principle 1: Security and Total Defense - Politics Must Be Grounded in Reality

Finnmark is Norway’s - and NATO’s - front line of defense. This defines all local decision-making. The acute situational awareness we live with is not always shared by national or international authorities.

It is time for this reality to become a pillar of the EU’s new Arctic strategy.

NATO’s Article 3 obliges us to maintain robust civil societies in peace, crisis, and war. This means that NATO’s seven baseline requirements cannot be *aspirational* - they must be the minimum standard.

This requires action now:

- Strategic ports
- Transport corridors capable of withstanding crisis and war
- 420 kV power lines and resilient electronic communications
- Health preparedness that can scale within hours, not months

This is not about luxury. It is about security. And yes - these measures will leave a footprint.

But in the North, security is the prerequisite for everything else - including environmental protection.

Guiding Principle 2: Indigenous Rights - A Policy That Must Include the Entire Arctic

Finnmark has been shaped by Sami, Kven, and Norwegian people for more than 10,000 years. Most of us are a product of precisely this blend.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that the Sami coastal population has paid the highest price through language and cultural prohibitions. This continues to influence today's practices concerning fisheries, land use, and traditions.

The Sami people do not live only one type of life.

Therefore, we say clearly:

Finnmark and the North consist of different people - and policy must recognize all of us.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that Sami communities, like everyone else, live modern lives. Today, the largest Sami employer in Finnmark is the energy and petroleum sector.

Indigenous rights must be protected.

But they must be safeguarded within a policy framework that also considers social development, employment needs, and preparedness requirements.

Guiding Principle 3: Climate Change and Energy Policy - Realism Must Replace Symbolic Politics

Warmer seas and a strong Gulf Stream are making large Arctic areas ice-free. This enables Norwegian activity in the North - activities in fisheries and petroleum that contribute directly to asserting sovereignty in the Barents Sea and around Svalbard.

But the climate challenges are real: changing fish migration patterns, weakened grazing areas, and increased pressure on nature.

This requires restructuring - but not necessarily winding down.

Given the current security situation, maintaining demands for zero development and zero procurement of Arctic petroleum products is simply unreasonable. Gas from Northern Norway has replaced Russian gas in Europe and has strengthened the total defense during several cold winters in recent years.

This is not only energy policy - it is security policy.

The core of our message is this:

The EU's Arctic strategy must build security before it builds anything else.
Security creates robust societies. Robust societies create resilience.
And resilience is the foundation for maintaining people's trust in government.

Because without trust - we risk losing everything.

Kind regards

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