

## **North Sweden welcomes the European Raw Materials Alliance**

In connection with the launch of the EU Action Plan on Critical Raw Materials and the European Raw Materials Alliance, the political leadership of Region Norrbotten and Region Västerbotten would like to share the following statement:

- North Sweden welcomes the European Raw Materials Alliance (ERMA)
- Calls for EU to enhance the focus on primary resources in the action plan
- Calls for EU to include the need for base metals in the action plan
- Calls for EU to give the business and research community a central role in the Alliance
- Calls for EU to involve regions through the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) platform

Norrbotten and Västerbotten, the two northernmost regions of Sweden at the top of the Fennoscandian Shield in the European Arctic, are home to world leading industries and research centres for sustainable extraction and refinement of raw materials. Over half of Europe's most critical mineral and metals are found in the Swedish bedrock, with most of the deposits in the north. The tradition, the competence and the capability throughout the whole value chain makes north Sweden the most advanced and most valuable ecosystem for the development of sustainable mining in Europe. North Sweden wants to strengthen its position as a global frontrunner for sustainable development, a reliable and efficient supplier of raw materials, an innovative testbed and a high-tech knowledge hub, as well as a vital facilitator for the European green and digital economy.

The recent EU Action Plan on Critical Raw Materials is aimed to develop resilient value chains for industrial ecosystems, reduce dependency on primary critical raw materials and strengthen domestic sourcing of raw materials in the EU. North Sweden welcomes the plan with the amplified ambitions for more resilient European value chains.

The development of circular systems for minerals certainly have a key role to limit the climate impact derived from the use of raw materials. North Sweden is leading the way with a large contribution to the circular economy, such as through mining and smelting company Boliden being one of the largest recyclers of used lead-acid batteries and scrapped electronic equipment in the world. The Northvolt gigafactory, partly financed through the European Investment Bank, will produce lithium-ion batteries for the European automotive industries, while also conducting world-scale recycling of critical raw materials such as lithium, cobalt, nickel and manganese.

At the same time, with a mounting demand for raw materials, primary resources will continue to have a key role for European value chains. Innovative efforts led by companies and research clusters to optimize the early stages of the value chain, including resource efficiency and improvements of processes in both exploration and extraction, limits the climate impact and should be emphasized more in the action plan.

The societal need for sustainable building blocks and the manufacturing industries demand for a secure supply of base metals, should also to be taken into account in order for Europe to strengthen its resilience and strategic autonomy. The action plan emphasises the ambitions of sustainable use and domestic sourcing of critical raw materials, but the alliance should put an equally strong focus on base metals. At the heart of Europe's iron ore reserve, mining company LKAB, hydropower company Vattenfall and steelmaking company SSAB has joined forces to develop the world's first fossil-free steel-making technology, with virtually no carbon footprint. Initiatives for sustainable development targeting all dimensions of the value chain for base metals should be encouraged and supported by the EU.

The high ambitions of the EU require a multi-sectorial and a multi-level governance approach to involve all relevant stakeholders to joint policy development and action. The business and research community should have a central role in ERMA. In the European Arctic, excellent applied research is conducted in close collaboration with the industry. Swerim is a world leading industrial research institute within engineering, process metallurgy, materials, manufacturing and industrial applications needed for resource efficient and sustainable industry. Luleå University of Technology leads several research and innovation partnerships, such as the Horizon 2020-project Sustainable Intelligent Mining Systems (SIMS), as well as hosting an EIT Raw Materials Innovation Hub. Umeå University and the Arctic Five, a collaboration of the five northernmost universities in the European Arctic, have comprehensive and multi-disciplinary research expertise on extractive industries and sustainable regional development.

EU has a key role to encourage strategic planning, cooperation and capacity building through a wide range of different investment tools, such as structural funds and territorial cooperation based on Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). Place-based development strategies has been essential for regions to tailor investments to fit the specific needs for each territory. ERMA should therefore involve the mining regions of Europe with similar challenges and opportunities through the thematic Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) platform, a network of regions in which Västerbotten is a current member and Norrbotten will now join. The increased EU support for regions to facilitate strategic investments in knowledge, technology and innovation together will be essential for sustainable development, reliable supply and European competitiveness.

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