

# High-level Select Roundtable Discussion

## Unlocking the Nordic Testbeds

12 March 2026 | Embassy of Sweden, Oslo

### Background

**At a time when Mario Draghi warns of Europe's declining competitiveness, the Nordic Region has a unique opportunity to lead the way – provided that crossborder barriers to innovation are removed.**

Europe faces a growing challenge: to translate research and innovation into commercial solutions to a greater extent in global competition with the US and China. In this context, the effective use of research and innovation infrastructure, including testbeds, is crucial.

The Nordic Region has strong research environments and world-leading testbeds, but these are not used optimally. The challenge is not a lack of capacity, but a lack of coordination, visibility, access and clear mandates. This limits the possibility to realise Nordic added value and fully leverage the benefits of joint investments.

A more coordinated use of testbeds and research infrastructure can create concrete Nordic benefits in the form of increased innovation capacity, strengthened competitiveness and better resource utilisation. At the same time, it can help position the Nordic region as a cohesive innovation ecosystem in global competition.

Against this background, the **High-level Select Roundtable Discussion – Unlocking the Nordic Testbeds** was organised by the Association of European Border Regions and the Svinesund Committee in collaboration with the Embassy of Sweden in Oslo and Nordic



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Innovation. The meeting was held on 12 March 2026 at the Embassy of Sweden in Oslo and brought together leading actors from politics, authorities, research institutions and industry.

The aim was to identify concrete steps to strengthen Nordic cooperation and realise Nordic added value through increased use of testbeds and other research and innovation infrastructure. The discussion was conducted according to the Chatham House Rule.

The Svinesund Committee, which is a political collaboration between Norwegian and Swedish municipalities and regions with a mission to contribute to sustainable growth and to reduce border barriers to innovation and business, would like to thank the participants for their valuable and insightful contributions, which have been important for the conclusions presented in this compilation.

## Strategic conclusions

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The roundtable discussion showed that the Nordic region has strong research environments, testbeds and innovation systems, but that the potential is not being fully exploited. The crucial challenge is not a lack of capacity, but fragmented structures, national systems and a lack of clear mandates, coordination and accessibility.

The obstacles are mainly linked to governance, mandates and financing models – not legislation. Today, in practice, there is a lack of writings on Nordic cooperation in appropriation letters, which means that incentives and resources for cross-border work are limited. This creates a clear gap between political ambitions and operational implementation.



Testbeds and research infrastructure need to be seen and used to a greater extent as a common Nordic resource. More integrated Nordic cooperation can increase accessibility, improve resource utilisation and strengthen innovation capacity, while strengthening the region's international competitiveness.

Companies – especially small and medium-sized ones – have a clear need for access to testbeds but face obstacles in the form of a lack of visibility, coordination and financing. To strengthen their opportunities to participate in the innovation system, more visible, accessible and coherent structures are required.

Successful examples of functioning Nordic innovation collaboration in life sciences can serve as guiding models (“lighthouses”) that highlight the potential, disseminate lessons learned and enable the scaling up of Nordic cooperation.

A common Nordic narrative and a more unified offering are crucial to positioning the Nordic region as a cohesive innovation region in global competition. The competition does not take place between Nordic countries, but between the Nordic region and other international innovation systems.

Overall, clearer political anchoring, strengthened governance and national financing that allows and enables cross-border cooperation are required. Without this, existing investments risk continuing to be used suboptimally.

In line with the European competitiveness debate, where Mario Draghi has highlighted the need to strengthen Europe's innovation capacity, a more effective use of testbeds appears to be central.

**A more integrated Nordic cooperation on testbeds can:**

- increase accessibility for companies
- strengthen companies' innovation capacity
- improve resource utilisation at testbeds increase Nordic attractiveness on the global market
- strengthen Europe's competitiveness



## Recommended ways forward

### 1) Create political support and direction

- a) Initiate a Nordic ministerial declaration on testbed cooperation

### 2) Clarify mandate and governance

- a) Introduce provisions on Nordic cooperation in appropriation letters and assignments to authorities
- b) Ensure that Nordic added value are integrated into governance and follow-up monitoring

### 3) Enable cross-border financing

- a) Develop joint financing solutions with a particular focus on enabling joint use of research and innovation infrastructure

### 4) Strengthen coordination and access

- a) Develop a joint Nordic overview of testbeds (via Nordic Innovation)
- b) Increase visibility and accessibility for companies

### 5) Make testbeds internationally available

- a) Ensure that test environments can be used across national borders
- b) Develop clear and common offers

### 6) Focus and scale

- a) Develop the “lighthouse” initiatives as models for scaling up general Nordic innovation cooperation

### 7) Ensure implementation

- a) Idar Kreuzer highlighted the possibility to contribute to the Nordic Draghi-report which is in the making
- b) Svinesund Committee organises a follow-up meeting at AstraZeneca BioVenture Hub in Gothenburg within six months
- c) Nordic Innovation continues the dialogue between national and Nordic actors
- d) Nordic Innovation creates a working group with Innovasjon Norway, Vinnova, SIVA and RISE to look for practical solutions



## Summary of sessions

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### Session 1 – Experiences of Nordic RDI cooperation

The first session highlighted experiences of Nordic research and innovation cooperation and how strategic partnerships between industry, research environments and innovation systems can strengthen the Nordic innovation capacity, but where cross-border barriers limit exchange because national funding is not allowed to go to companies from other countries.

Many countries have developed national systems for long-term planning and financing of research infrastructures, often in the form of so-called “roadmaps”. All Nordic countries have such national roadmaps, which are supplemented by the established European cooperation within ESFRI. However, there is no common Nordic roadmap for research infrastructure. One explanation is that the national and European levels are largely considered to cover the needs for strategic planning and cooperation.

Experience shows that it is very difficult to reach a common Nordic agreement on the distribution of work between countries, for example regarding the establishment of different infrastructures. It is also difficult to agree on joint financing of the construction of research infrastructure. However, there are good conditions for joint financing of the use of infrastructures, provided that access does not discriminate between countries.





The discussion showed that strategic partnerships, such as the one between AstraZeneca and the University of Oslo and Oslo Science Park, are crucial to enabling scaling and commercialisation. Access to collaboration with industrial companies with global reach was highlighted as particularly important for smaller companies to grow.

There are examples, including in life sciences and emerging technologies, where Nordic actors have together succeeded in creating strong and internationally competitive innovation environments that are open to companies from other Nordic countries. These successful examples can act as “lighthouses” that highlight the potential, disseminate lessons learned and enable the scaling up of Nordic cooperation.

At the same time, these collaborations are also limited by national funding systems and regulations, which means that the potential Nordic benefits are not fully realised.



Additional challenges for cross-border innovation in practice, are access to data (e.g. health data), mobility of experts and management of intellectual property rights.

### **The central conclusion is clear:**

There is a need to build on Nordic areas of strength to a greater extent and create better conditions for cooperation across national borders – with the aim of maximising Nordic added value and strengthen Nordic competitiveness. We should build on positive examples, “lighthouses”.

## **Session 2 – Testbeds and innovation infrastructure**

The second session focused on the role of testbeds in the innovation system and their importance for companies’ development, scaling and internationalisation.

The discussion showed that many testbeds are not yet fully internationalised, despite stated ambitions. The obstacles currently do not relate to law, but rather to a lack of maturity in the internationalisation work.



It was also emphasised that testbeds need to become more visible and communicate their offers more clearly. Companies often lack awareness of the opportunities available that testbeds offer, which limits demand and use.

At the same time, companies are increasingly demanding access to high-quality test environments, often across national borders. Today, this is limited by a lack of coordination, visibility and access to publicly funded testbeds.

A contributing reason is that there is currently a practical lack of writings on Nordic cooperation in regulatory letters and assignments to authorities, which means that the incentives for cross-border cooperation are very limited.

Overall, there is significant potential in positioning the Nordic region as a cohesive testbed region. Increased coordination, shared visibility and models for sharing operational costs can strengthen the use of existing capacity.

**The central conclusion is clear:**

The challenge is not a lack of testbeds (there are hundreds of testbeds in Sweden alone) – but a lack of coordination, visibility and access. This currently limits the possibility of realising Nordic benefits from existing investments in testbeds and innovation infrastructure.

To address this, testbeds need to become more internationally accessible (one such example is MobilityXLab), with clear offers, improved cross-border access and strengthened coordination between countries.



### Session 3 – Policy and mandates

The lack of clear mandates for authorities and institutions to work across national borders was identified as a crucial obstacle to realising Nordic added value.

The discussion showed that the obstacles are not primarily legislative, but to a large extent linked to governance, assignments and financing models. There is a clear gap between political ambitions and operational implementation, where Nordic initiatives are not fully reflected in national governance.

Today, there is a lack of writings on Nordic cooperation in appropriation letters and assignments to authorities, which means that incentives and resources for cross-border work do not exist. This points to the need to prioritise financing of joint use to a greater extent, which could be facilitated by clearer assignments in national governance to contribute to joint Nordic initiatives.


At the same time, financing is mainly national and often limited to use within one's own country, which further complicates joint initiatives. This limits the possibility of using testbeds and research infrastructure across national borders.



This creates a system where political priorities are not translated into implementation. Even in emerging areas, such as quantum technology, there is often a lack of connection, from Nordic ambitions to be the world's most sustainable and integrated region and to funding and operational missions.

#### **The central conclusion is clear:**

There is a need for clearer political governance, strengthened interaction between the national level and Nordic structures, and the development of joint financing solutions to enable concrete cooperation and realise Nordic added value.



## Continued discussion – coordination and regional perspective

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The continued discussion highlighted that the Nordic region has strong research environments, testbeds and regional innovation systems, with Västra Götaland as a clear example of a well-developed model characterised by close collaboration between academia, research institutes and industry.

There is a clear and growing interest from the research community to strengthen Nordic cooperation. This is driven, among other things, by geopolitical developments, increased focus on research safety and responsible internationalisation, and changed global collaborations.

Nordic researchers are increasingly demanding collaboration with like-minded countries that share values around trust and academic freedom. Previous Nordic collaborations have in many cases created strong relationships that there is a desire to further develop.

A recurring perspective was that testbeds and research infrastructure need to be seen to a greater extent as a common Nordic resource. To achieve this, it is necessary to make it easier for companies to access the right environments across national borders and to connect with relevant partners.



SMEs in particular were highlighted as a group with great needs, but limited opportunities to navigate between different systems. It was highlighted here that the obstacles lie largely in financing models and co-financing requirements, rather than in the testbeds themselves. Financing that ends at national borders constitutes a central obstacle to cross-border innovation.

It was also emphasised that there is significant potential in better utilising Nordic areas of strength through increased coordination. Strong examples, for example in life science, show



that Nordic cooperation can create internationally competitive environments when the right actors are connected.

A common Nordic narrative was highlighted as crucial to strengthening the region's international attractiveness.

**The central conclusion is clear:**

Global competition is not between Nordic countries, but between the Nordic region and other international innovation systems. With a clearer mandate, common incentives and strengthened coordination, the Nordic region fully realise the benefits of its existing investments.

**Annika Daisley**

The Svinesunds Committee

**Caitriona Mullan** and **Kjell Nilsson**

Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)



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Oslo



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