Joint communications statement

Strengthening the Europe-Republic of Korea Digital Gateway with Polar Connect

In line with the European Union-Republic of Korea Digital Partnership, and to strengthen the collaboration on submarine cables, NORDUnet and KREONET have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for collaboration on intercontinental connectivity and the provision of high-speed digital connections between the Nordic countries and the Republic of Korea, and specifically to support the Polar Connect initiative aimed at safeguarding European and the Republic of Korea digital autonomies. This agreement recognizes the benefits of secure, resilient, and sustainable international connectivity between Europe and other world regions through the Arctic, in support of research, economic development, innovation, and education.

In our modern digital society, more than 97% of the internet traffic flows via submarine cables. However, the routes used by those cables have become insecure in the current geopolitical context.

Therefore, *Polar Connect* will use a novel cable route through the Arctic, where Europe and Asia can directly interconnect using a resilient, secure, and sovereign infrastructure, key to Europe's and Republic of Korea's digital autonomies.

Valter Nordh, NORDUnet CEO, says:
"NORDUnet and the Nordic National Research and Education Networks have identified and created an innovative vision for such a resilient system[1], promoting the new infrastructure *Polar Connect*, being highly critical and enabling new opportunities in terms of communications and research collaboration with our international partners. The Polar Connect route is now recognised as a priority area for Cable Projects of European Interest (CPEI) by the European Union[2], confirming the initiative's strategic importance for Europe's digital future."

Buseung Cho, KREONET Director, added:
"KREONET and NORDUnet have been working together since the 2000s, and more recently have joined forces to build a high-performance, resilient international research network under the Global Research and Education Network (GREN). By now extending this partnership to Polar Connect, we will secure submarine cable infrastructure that directly links Europe and East Asia, strengthening its role as core research infrastructure that accelerates cooperation between Korea and Europe not only in large-scale science such as high-energy physics, astronomy and space science, climate change, but also in advanced research areas ranging from supercomputing to AI."

KREONET and NORDUnet have a long history of collaboration in networking, as partners of the Asia-Pacific Europe Ring consortia and the Advanced North Atlantic consortia for intercontinental connectivity and through initiatives supporting global network advancement. They both recognize the strategic importance and asset of a strong, sustainable, and resilient

[1] https://polarconnect.net/Vision2030
[2] https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/submarine-cable-security-toolbox-and-cable-projects-european-interest

international footprint for Republic of Korea and Europe, and its potential to support innovation, research collaboration, and broader economic and technological cooperation, including in the context of initiatives such as the European Union's Global Gateway strategy and the EU- Republic of Korea Digital Partnership.

About NORDUnet

NORDUnet is a collaboration between the National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) of the five Nordic countries, i.e., Denmark (DeiC), Finland (Funet/CSC), Iceland (RHnet), Norway (Sikt), and Sweden (Sunet). NORDUnet operates a world-class data network, based on dark fiber and spectrum sharing, together with support for e-infrastructures, including media services like videoconferencing and lecture capturing and playback. More than 400 research & education institutions in the Nordics, with over 1.2 million users, are connected via the Nordic NREN networks, enabling scientists, educators, and students to work and share knowledge globally. NORDUnet is an active participant in the European NREN collaboration GÉANT and is a founding father of intercontinental NREN collaborations such as the Advanced North Atlantic (ANA) and Asia-Pacific Europe Ring (AER) systems that are part of the Global Research and Education Network (GREN). In 2020, NORDUnet celebrated 40 years of Nordic NREN collaboration.

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About KREONET

Korea Research Environment Open NETwork (KREONET) is Korea's national science and research network, operated by the Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information (KISTI), and accelerates scientific discovery by providing high-performance research resources alongside national supercomputing infrastructure. The mission of KREONET is to develop, build, and operate a world-class national research network infrastructure and application platform and to apply state-of-art network technology and provide advanced network service and collaboration environment to the R&E community at institutions of higher education, national research labs or institutes, governments, libraries, university hospitals, and industry research labs. KREONET is an active participant in the Asia Pacific Oceania Network (APOnet), the Advanced North Atlantic (ANA) and Asia-Pacific Europe Ring (AER) and East Asia Resilient Backbone Network collaboration (EARBN).

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