

Integrated European Union policy for the Arctic

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PURPOSE: to present an integrated European Union policy for the Arctic.

BACKGROUND: the EU has a strategic interest in playing a key role in the Arctic region, which must remain a safe, stable, sustainable and prosperous not just for the region itself, but for the world.

Eight states have territories in the Arctic: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. Three EU Member States are therefore also Arctic states, while Iceland and Norway are members of the European Economic Area.

The Arctic needs a solid framework for sound stewardship: large parts of the high seas areas beyond national jurisdiction are currently not covered by specific arrangements for managing economic activities, nor is there sufficient scientific knowledge about the sea basin.

Against this background, several Member States have issued national Arctic policy frameworks in recent years. In 2014, the Council and European Parliament asked the Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to develop an integrated policy on Arctic matters, and to develop a more coherent framework for EU action and funding programmes.

In response, an integrated EU Arctic policy is proposed in this joint communication.

CONTENT: this joint communication proposes an integrated EU Arctic policy in three priority areas:

The fight against climate change and safeguarding the arctic environment: in recent years, the Arctic's role in climate change has become much more prominent. The Arctic is warming at almost twice the global average rate. It is essential to understand better the problems with which the region is faced.

Strategies must focus on fighting climate change, research and environmental protection. The EU should, in particular:

- maintain its current funding levels for Arctic research (around EUR 200 million in the past decade) under the Horizon 2020 programme. The EU has already committed EUR 40 million under the 2016-2017 work programme to Arctic-related research. A central plank of the EUs Arctic research efforts will be the EU-PolarNet initiative, which supports an EU-wide consortium of expertise and infrastructure for polar research to better assimilate Europe's scientific and operational capabilities in the Polar regions;
- promote and facilitate effective international scientific cooperation through supporting transnational access to research infrastructure and open data resources to maintain good relations with key countries in the region ;
- work with regions in the Arctic to draw up appropriate climate change adaptation and mitigation measures that take account of the local circumstances and special nature of the Arctic regions. It can do this partly through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), which mainstream climate action;
- contribute to international efforts to limit emissions of short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon and methane that further accelerate climactic changes in the Arctic;
- work with partners to promote a high level of biodiversity protection and support the establishment of marine protected areas in the Arctic;
- support work at international level to prohibit or phase out the use of persistent organic pollutants in the environment between now and 2020 in order to protect inhabitants of the Arctic;
- work closely with Member States, the OSPAR Convention and other stakeholders on oil and gas activities to promote the adoption of the highest standards of major accident prevention and environmental control.

Sustainable development in and around the Arctic: the EU should also promote sustainable development in the Arctic, taking into account both the traditional livelihoods of those living in the region and the impact of economic development on the Arctic's fragile environment. It should contribute to enhancing the economic, social and environmental resilience of societies in the Arctic:

- investment by European companies can help advance sustainable development in the region, possibly aided by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and initiatives under the Investment Plan for Europe;
- the climate of the Arctic region also makes it an ideal innovation site for cold climate technologies and services;
- opportunities in the Green Economy, such as sustainable multi-source energy systems, eco-tourism and low emission food production, could be developed further;
- there are potential opportunities for sustainable economic activities in Blue Economy sectors such as aquaculture, fisheries, offshore renewable energy, maritime tourism and marine biotechnology;
- energy is expected to be a growth sector, and may include on- and off-shore wind power, ocean energy, geothermal energy and hydropower.

3) International cooperation on Arctic issues: the EU has a strong interest in seeing that the Arctic remains a zone of constructive international cooperation where complex issues are addressed through negotiated solutions, and where common platforms can be established in response to emerging risks

In particular, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides a framework for managing the Arctic Ocean including the peaceful settlement of disputes. The EU will continue its active participation in the Arctic Council and continue to support regional and sub-regional cooperation.

The EU will continue to engage with Arctic indigenous peoples and local communities to ensure that their views and rights are respected and promoted in the ongoing development of EU policies affecting the Arctic.

The EU needs to ensure that the necessary coordination structures are in place at EU level to meet the challenges ahead. The Council could consider establishing a Working Party on Arctic matters and northern cooperation and the European Parliament could similarly consider

establishing a delegation on Arctic matters and northern cooperation.