Resolution on Arctic governance

2008/2633(RSP) - 09/10/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 8 October 2008, the European Parliament adopted by 597 votes to 23 with 41 abstentions a resolution on Arctic governance. The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the EPP-ED, PES, and ALDE, groups.

Parliament is deeply concerned at the **effects of climate change on the sustainability of the lives of the indigenous peoples** in the region, in terms of both the general environment (melting icecap and permafrost, rising sea levels and flooding) and the natural habitat (the retreating icecap poses problems for polar bears' feeding habits). It underlines that any international decisions relating to these issues must fully involve and take account of all peoples and nations of the Arctic.

It recalls that during the 20th century, Arctic air temperatures increased by approximately 5 °C, and that this increase is ten times faster than the observed global mean surface temperature. Additional warming of about 4-7 °C in the Arctic is predicted for the next hundred years. Parliament believes that the **time for diagnosis is over and the time for action is now.**

Arctic species and societies have developed highly specialised methods of adaptation to the harsh conditions found at the poles, thus making them extremely vulnerable to dramatic changes in these conditions. Parliament stated that very concerned for walruses, polar bears, seals and other marine mammals which rely on sea-ice for resting, feeding, hunting and breeding, and which are particularly threatened by climate change. It welcomes the fact that the 'High North' forms part of the EU's Northern Dimension policy, but is convinced that awareness of the Arctic's importance in a global context needs to be raised further by delivering a **standalone EU Arctic policy**. Accordingly, it awaits with great interest the forthcoming Commission communication on Arctic policy, calling on the Commission to address certain issues in its communication. These include the state of play in relation to climate change, and adaptation to it, in the region and policy options that respect the indigenous populations and their livelihoods. The Commission needs also to discuss options for a **future cross-border political or legal structure** that could provide for the environmental protection and sustainable orderly development of the region or mediate political disagreement over resources and navigable waterways in the High North.

Parliament draws attention to the fact that the Arctic region, by virtue of its impact on the world's climate and its singular natural environment, merits special consideration as the EU develops its position for the COP 15 UN Climate Change Conference, due to be held in Copenhagen in 2009.

It takes the view that the **maritime traffic** in the region (both tourist- and offshore drilling-related) does not enjoy anywhere near the level of minimum international safety rules that prevail in other international waters, in terms of either protection of human life or protection of the environment. The Commission is urged to ensure that appropriate amendments are made to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) regulations.

Members support the Arctic Council in maintaining the Arctic region as a region of low tension, open to international research cooperation, so as to allow its potential as a **future energy supplier region** to be fully developed within a sustainable environmental framework. They remain particularly concerned over the ongoing race for natural resources in the Arctic, which may lead to security threats for the EU and overall international instability. The Commission is urged to take a proactive role in the Arctic by taking up 'observer status' on the Arctic Council, and setting up a dedicated Arctic desk.

Parliament suggests that the Commission should be prepared to pursue the opening of international negotiations designed to lead to the adoption of an **international treaty for the protection of the Arctic,** having as its inspiration the Antarctic Treaty, as supplemented by the Madrid Protocol signed in 1991, but respecting the fundamental difference represented by the populated nature of the Arctic and the consequent rights and needs of the peoples and nations of the Arctic region. As a minimum starting-point, however, such a treaty could at least cover the unpopulated and unclaimed area at the centre of the Arctic Ocean .