

Integrated European Union policy for the Arctic

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the own-initiative report prepared by Sirpa PIETIKÄINEN (EPP, FI) and Urmas PAET (ADLE, EE) on an integrated European Union policy for the Arctic.

Members recalled the **longstanding engagement of the EU** in the Arctic. Three of its Member States – Denmark, Finland and Sweden – are Arctic countries.

The effects of climate change and growing competition for access to the Arctic and its natural resources, and increasing economic activities, have brought risks to the region, including challenges to the environment and human security.

Given the growing importance of the region's geopolitical situation, the Arctic should remain an **international low-tension area**. In this regard, the report stressed the importance of continued engagement and dialogue with Russia within the framework of Arctic regional cooperation, notwithstanding the increase in the stationing of Russian military forces in the region.

Towards an integrated EU policy: welcoming the joint communication by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the report stressed the need for more coherence between the EU's internal and external policies as regards Arctic matters. It also reiterated its call for a **strategy** and an **action plan** on the EU's engagement in the Arctic, wherein the aim of preserving the vulnerable ecosystem of the Arctic should be the starting point.

Underlining the importance of UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Members considered **respect for international law** in the Arctic essential. They advocated a strong role for the EU in promoting effective multilateral arrangements and a global, rules-based order. They also suggested reinforcing **multilateral Arctic governance** through the strengthening and consistent implementation of relevant international, regional and bilateral agreements, frameworks and arrangements.

Preservation and environmental protection in the region: the report called on the Member States to take a stronger role in the effective implementation of international conventions, such as Paris Agreement, Minamata Convention, Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution, Gothenburg Protocol, Stockholm Convention, Århus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity.

Members supported the development of a **network of Arctic conservation areas** and called for any development of commercial fishing in the region to be carried out in a way that is fully compatible with the sensitive and specific nature of the region.

The EU is called upon to promote **strict precautionary regulatory standards** in the field of environmental protection and safety for oil exploration, prospection and production internationally.

The Commission should also use its enabling role in the on-going negotiations in the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to **ban the use of heavy fuel oil** and carriage as ship fuel in vessels navigating the Arctic seas through the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL Convention).

Protecting local populations: given that some four million people live in the Arctic region, of which some 10 % are indigenous peoples, Members called for more stringent safeguards for the vulnerable

environment as well as for **fundamental rights of indigenous people**, as well as their right to give their prior consent as regards the extraction of natural resources.

In this regard, Parliament called for special attention to be paid to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4.5**, which includes ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for indigenous peoples, also in their own languages.

Preserving marine ecosystems: noting that the volume of sea ice present during the summer has fallen by more than 40 % in 35 years and that climate change is advancing at a double pace in the polar regions, Members called for the adoption of a **precautionary approach** in order to establish appropriate international measures to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of resources on the Arctic high seas.

Scientific cooperation: in order to improve knowledge in the Arctic, the report encouraged the promotion and facilitation of international scientific and research cooperation among all stakeholders active in the field of Arctic research. It supported cooperation between leading Arctic research institutions with a view to developing an integrated **European polar research programme** under the EU-PolarNet initiative that incorporates traditional and local knowledge.