

The Arctic: opportunities, concerns and security challenges

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Anna FOTYGA (ECR, PL) on the Arctic: opportunities, concerns and security challenges.

International cooperation as a basis for a safe, stable, prosperous, accessible and peaceful Arctic

Recalling the political and strategic importance of the Arctic for the EU and for maintaining the environmental balance of the planet, Members considered it essential that all stakeholders, including the EU and its Member States, act to maintain peaceful and intense international and regional cooperation, scientific research, prosperity and low tensions in the Arctic, as well as to address the very alarming effects and consequences of climate change in the region.

The EU should contribute to strengthened **multilateral governance in the Arctic**, promote sustainable use of resources and protect and preserve the Arctic, together with its people. The EU's Arctic policy should include new actors such as China and consider the security dimension.

While recognising the sovereign status of the Arctic states and their sovereign rights under international law, the report stressed that the EU's capacity to provide solutions to **potential security challenges** should be fully exploited and that global, regional and local fora are needed for dialogue on the security needs of the region.

Climate change

Concerned by the IPCC's findings that global warming has led to widespread shrinking of the cryosphere in recent decades, with a mass loss of ice caps and glaciers, Members urged the EU to take a leading role in work to build an **ambitious climate action plan for the Arctic**. EU policies should ensure that the interests of the people of the Arctic region, including indigenous peoples, in protecting and developing the region.

Geopolitical developments in the Arctic

The Arctic has been relatively well preserved for a long time but is increasingly affected by the growing international interest in the region and by security developments, including the progressive remilitarisation of Russia in the region.

Stressing that a **secure, stable, sustainable, peaceful and prosperous Arctic** is essential for Europe's overall security, Members called for enhanced regional dialogue, cross-border cooperation and military restraint, and encouraged a process of negotiations and confidence-building measures to achieve the long-term objective of reducing military equipment in the region.

Safeguarding the freedom of navigation

Arctic coastal states are urged to take prompt action to fully implement the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Code on Polar Shipping. Members called for a shared responsibility for the safety of human life at sea and the sustainability of polar environments as polar shipping grows in volume and diversifies in nature in the coming years.

The Commission and Member States are called upon to play a stronger role in **promoting the effective implementation of international conventions**, such as the Paris Agreement, the Minamata Convention, the Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution, the Gothenburg Protocol, the Stockholm Convention, the Code on Polar Shipping, the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The report stressed the need to **strengthen maritime surveillance** and information sharing within the Arctic region and to respect the rights of foreign vessels in the Arctic under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), including the right of innocent passage, the right of transit passage and freedom of navigation. The development of northern transport routes should be sustainable and contribute to a greener transition.

Sustainable development and exploitation of strategic resources

The report emphasised the sustainable and scientific exploitation of energy resources in the Arctic and stressed the need for a strengthened policy on domestically produced renewable energy and energy efficiency that will significantly reduce the EU's dependence on external sources and thus improve its security position.

In view of the environmental risk posed by the exploitation of oil and gas in the Arctic, Members called for **strict requirements to be introduced for the exploration and exploitation of new hydrocarbon reserves** in the region. They expressed concern about attempts, notably by Russia and private companies in other countries, to pursue large-scale development projects without assessing their environmental impact.

The Arctic is also expected to play a central role in the **European raw materials alliance**, boosting European production of key minerals and reducing dependence on China for rare earth metals.

Science and knowledge

The report called on all states to ensure that **indigenous and local Arctic peoples** are involved in the deliberation and decision-making processes of relevant international fora on climate diplomacy and biodiversity. Stressing that the EU is one of the main financial contributors to Arctic research, through programmes such as Horizon 2020, Members called for increased EU funding for Arctic research and development.

More EU in the Arctic, more Arctic in the EU

Members considered that the EU, as a global player, should engage in active political dialogue, react to the growing strategic importance of the Arctic and continue to play its role as an accepted and credible actor in the region. They called on the Commission to set up a working group covering all issues related to Northern Europe and the Arctic. The Arctic should also be given a more prominent place in Parliament, including through the creation of a specific interparliamentary delegation.