



European Economic and Social Committee

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EU Arctic Policy

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OPINION

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on

EU Arctic Policy to address globally emerging interests in the region – a view of civil society

Rapporteur: **Mr Hamro-Drotz**

At its plenary session on 11 and 12 July 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on:

EU Arctic Policy to address globally emerging interests in the region – a view of civil society.

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 27 March 2013.

At its 489th plenary session held on 17 and 18 April 2013 (meeting of 17 April) the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 163 votes to 1, with 6 abstentions.

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1. Summary

- 1.1 The Arctic is undergoing a period of profound change. Climate change is having a significant impact on global warming and a shrinking ice sheet in the region, which are in turn affecting weather conditions and environmental changes around the world. At the same time, they are having an impact on the global economy, because they present new opportunities for economic activity in the resource-rich region. The world's gaze has turned to the Arctic region, whose fragile ecosystem and population require proper protection and attention. These changes may have geopolitical consequences.
- 1.2 The EESC calls on the EU to provide a clear Arctic strategy and a credible commitment to cooperation with the Arctic states. The Arctic is of huge importance to the EU and the EU has a lot to contribute to Arctic cooperation. The Committee calls for investment in responsible economic activity based on cold climate expertise and for development of infrastructure. It also calls for cooperation to continue on research into climate change and for a determined effort to protect the region's fragile environment.
- 1.3 The position of the Arctic Council as well as the EU's position in the Council should be strengthened. Civil society should be broadly involved in Arctic cooperation. There is a need for more openness and a determined effort to improve communication in Arctic cooperation.
- 1.4 The public hearing it held in northern Finland (Rovaniemi) in cooperation with the University of Lapland's Arctic Centre¹ was of great value to the EESC. The Committee aims to contribute to Arctic cooperation and to EU Arctic policy, and to strengthen its links with civil society in the region.

¹ The University of Lapland is the EU's northernmost university, www.ulapland.fi; www.arcticcentre.org.

2. Main views and recommendations of civil society

This opinion presents the views and recommendations of EU civil society organisations on EU Arctic policy, with particular reference to the Joint Communication from the Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs of June 2012 and the related joint staff working document².

- 2.1 The Arctic's strategic importance has grown considerably, and there is increasing interest in the region globally. It is therefore vital that the EU finalise its Arctic policy as soon as possible, so that it can take part as a credible and constructive player and initiator in cooperation in the Arctic region. The EU needs to demonstrate its commitment to the Arctic and to cooperation in the region. Consideration should be given first and foremost to the northern parts of the EU's Arctic member states and to solidifying cooperation with the Arctic states, above all with neighbouring countries in Europe (including Greenland). The situation requires a **fully developed Arctic strategy from the EU**.

Concentrating EU resources earmarked for the Arctic region in one place or coordinating them effectively, and including a heading for the Arctic region in the EU budget, are needed to ensure credible implementation of an EU Arctic policy/strategy.

- 2.2 The EU's Arctic policy/strategy and the strategies of the Arctic states should be consistent with one another; Arctic governance should be developed and implemented on the basis of constructive cooperation with those countries and key partners. Arctic cooperation and coexistence should be based wherever possible on **international agreements and cooperation in international organisations** (including the UN, the IMO, the FAO and the ILO). Cooperation is made easier by the fact that the participating countries would have ratified the most important of these agreements with a bearing on the Arctic.

- 2.3 The race now under way in the Arctic must not be allowed to escalate into conflict. The EU should promote dialogue on an international legal mechanism for dispute resolutions which would be binding to all the parties involved. This is one reason why, as proposed back in 2010 and endorsed by the European Parliament³, an **Arctic summit** should be organised under the aegis of the Arctic Council as soon as possible giving key players interested in the region and in cooperation a chance to discuss the region's future and seek a common understanding of principles for collaboration there. It would make sense to also hold such summits on a regular basis in the future, and successful cooperation between players in the Arctic will require effective tools, such as a shared communication and monitoring network based on modern technology.

² Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region: progress since 2008 and next steps, Brussels, JOIN(2012) 19 final, 26.6.2012.

³ See the European Parliament resolution of 20 January 2011 on *A sustainable EU policy for the High North*, P7_TA(2011)0024, p. 52.

- 2.4 The EESC agrees that the **position of the Arctic Council should be strengthened** and that it should have a mandate to operate as an international forum for negotiations on key Arctic issues. Successful cooperation in the Arctic Council depends on all Arctic states being treated equally.

The EU should have a stronger position in the Council, because this would allow it to better contribute to the Council's work and to boost the Council's influence through its participation. The EU has a lot to contribute to cooperation. One possible way to strengthen EU's position is to become an observer entity and the Arctic EU member States should take into account also EU views in the Council.

The EU should also endeavour to **strengthen cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council** (and Barents Regional Council), because they play a key role in cross-border interaction amongst the 13 member regions (in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia) of the resource-rich Barents region. The EU should promote cooperation among and use the expertise of different regional cooperation forums, including those mentioned in section 4, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Council of Baltic Sea States, or the Nordic-Baltic Eight.

- 2.5 The EESC agrees on the need for more comprehensive and credible data on climate changes taking place globally and in the Arctic, whose environmental conditions are unique and whose ecosystem is fragile. There should continue to be a determined focus on **scientific research and monitoring** in relation to climate change and ecological, environmental and meteorological issues. The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), the Snow, Water, Ice and Permafrost in the Arctic (SWIPA) assessment, the Ice2Sea programme the EU Arctic Footprint and Policy Assessment Project and participation in the Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks (SAON) can serve to catalyse research cooperation in the Arctic. The EU's established, well-functioning research and monitoring cooperation networks should be made more effective in order to deepen knowledge and boost capacity.

- 2.5.1 So far the focus of research has largely been on mitigating and managing climate change in different parts of the world, but climate change and its consequences already seem to have reached a tipping point beyond which they can hardly be halted⁴. There should therefore be more emphasis on research into preservation of Arctic environment and sustainable management of natural resources as well as adapting to the social and economic consequences of climate change. Research activities and results should be made public; research must cover all aspects of the issue, and it must be open and inclusive for civil society and researchers from all EU countries (see also point 2.9).

⁴ Norsk Polarinstitutt, www.npolar.no, and Matthews, J.A.: The Encyclopaedia of Environmental Change, Sage, London 2013.

- 2.5.2 Arctic research should be given more emphasis in the EU's research programmes and a separate appropriation should be earmarked for it in the EU's financial framework for 2014-2020.
- 2.6 The Arctic region is of considerable **economic importance** to the local population, to Europe as a whole and more widely. Entrepreneurship in the region, including the processing industry and rural entrepreneurship, should be encouraged in different ways, such as through initiatives like ArcticStartup and training. Investment should be promoted. When it comes to resource extraction and other economic activities, the EU should invest in **technology adapted to Arctic conditions** and in developing and deploying **relevant cold-climate expertise**. This includes offshore deep-sea drilling, mining and maritime industries, designing and building ships and machinery, and port, dockyard and transportation technology.
- 2.6.1 Development of **infrastructure**, especially rail, road, air and maritime transport as well as energy transportation networks, should also be based on technology and know-how suited to the Arctic's harsh environmental conditions. Creating well-functioning infrastructure/logistics (both north-south and west-east) is of fundamental significance to development in the Arctic.
- 2.6.2 Other important areas for development that need funding in the region include building population centres, use of IT in sparsely populated areas (distance schooling, e-healthcare) and tourism.
- 2.6.3 While developing the Northern Sea Route of transportation, as a cost-efficient and in some aspects safer alternative to the Southern route via Suez, the EU should take due account to environmental considerations. The EU should work towards making new **shipping routes** in the Arctic accessible to "innocent passage" in line with international agreements (UNCLOS), including where routes pass through different countries' exclusive economic zones. This is of crucial importance to the development of both freight and passenger traffic in the region.
- 2.6.4 The EU should do more to integrate these priorities into the **Europe 2020 strategy for growth** and its other programmes, such as Innovation Union and Horizon 2020. EU regional and cohesion policy and the Interreg and ENPI programmes are of major importance to the EU's outermost northern regions, and it is vital that they continue to reach these regions and their neighbouring regions effectively, supporting the economy and societal activity and promoting cross-border cooperation.
- 2.6.5 The EU also needs to invest in cooperation initiatives in the region agreed with its partners. The **Northern Dimension** transport partnership project needs special attention and sufficient resources, because it can encourage the development of transportation routes from the resource-rich Barents region, including to European markets. For example, it is essential to build land connections between the EU and key Arctic ports, such as Murmansk and Narvik, without delay. Such projects should be seen as very urgent (see also: 2.6.1 and 2.6.3).

Directing resources towards promoting economic activity in the region could positively affect employment, economic growth and people's well-being there.

- 2.7 It is essential to ensure a **sustainable balance between environmental protection and economic activity** in the Arctic. The EU should make a determined effort to help the Arctic countries to achieve this balance, because the region's ecosystem is particularly fragile. Activity in the Arctic should comply with the highest **international standards of sustainable development** that conditions in the region require. Corporate social responsibility is key, as are the OECD's Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Companies should operate with **responsible caution** especially in places of particular natural value or that are sacred to indigenous people. Fishing should also observe the same responsible caution, taking care to use deep-sea fish stocks sustainably on the basis of EU rules on high-sea fishing, the relevant FAO guidelines, Joint Communication JOIN(2012) 19 final and the accompanying staff working document SWD(2012) 182 final and possibly also the agreement under the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC/CPANE)⁵. This is vital to safeguarding vitality and well-being in the Arctic.
- 2.7.1 The EU's guidelines on and experience with **environmental impact assessments** and maritime policy should be actively made available for Arctic cooperation. In addition to assessing the environmental impact of economic activity, its economic impact should always be assessed as well.
- 2.7.2 The EU should work to ensure that the Arctic Council's new **agreement on avoiding oil spills** is fully implemented, and that negotiations will begin on the principles governing drilling.
- 2.7.3 It is also vital that negotiations on the **IMO's shipping code for the polar regions (Polar Code)** be concluded successfully. In terms of Arctic shipping routes, the EU should also make its **Galileo satellite surveillance** services available to enhance navigation and safety, combining the system with others like it where possible.
- 2.8 The EESC strongly supports the **dialogue** launched by the EU **with Sami and other indigenous peoples** and with interest groups in the Arctic region. There should be a determined effort to sustain and strengthen this dialogue. The cultural heritage and traditional livelihood (including reindeer husbandry) of indigenous peoples should be respected. Residents of the region mainly belong to non-indigenous groups (around 90%), however, which is why dialogue should at the same time be extended to the population as a whole. The EESC also agrees with the observation in the June 2012 Communication, that "**the Arctic offers both challenges and opportunities that will significantly affect the life of European citizens in future generations**". Changes in the Arctic will have an impact on people's living conditions not just there and in neighbouring regions, but also in other parts of the world (for

⁵ [OJ C 133, 9.5.2013, pp. 41-43.](#)

example, economic potential, increasing incidence of extreme weather conditions caused by climate change, shifts in ocean currents, rising sea levels, drought and heavy rain and snow falls).

2.8.1 **Civil society needs to be broadly and regularly involved in Arctic work alongside indigenous peoples.** Various social stakeholders, including business, employees and environmental conservationists, should be involved in both multilateral and EU activities relating to the Arctic. Dialogue, round-table discussions and hearings should be arranged with various civil society groups.

2.8.2 The EESC recommends that the EU work to improve civil society participation on several levels:

- each Arctic country should involve key civil society partners in its Arctic work;
- key civil society partners should be given a stronger advisory role in the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council on issues concerning civil society;
- the EU should include dialogue with the key EU civil society partners in its own forthcoming Arctic policy/strategy.

2.8.3 The EESC's aim is to take part in this work, presenting the views and proposals of organised civil society in the EU. The EESC also intends to strengthen its ties with civil society in the Arctic both within and beyond the EU's borders. The aim is to support the voice and organised representation of civil society in the Arctic countries. Steps also need to be taken to ensure that scope is created for sub-regional and local players to express their views at EU level.

2.9 The EESC agrees with the view that much **more transparency and public information on the Arctic** and cooperation in the region is needed. The EU should therefore call for an effective **communications strategy** for Arctic cooperation. To this end, the EESC fully supports the proposal put forward by the Commission in 2008⁶ and noted by the Council of Ministers in 2009⁷ and later by the European Parliament⁸, to **set up an EU Arctic Information Centre**. It would primarily be responsible for providing information on the results of research and other activities linked to cooperation in the Arctic. This initiative is important expressly in terms of increased transparency. The fact that the European Commission has tasked the University of Lapland's Arctic Centre with carrying out the preparatory work for the centre is welcome. The Information Centre could operate as a network, with participation by Arctic research and communications bodies from Europe and elsewhere. Civil society should also play a role here.

⁶ European Commission communication on *The European Union and the Arctic Region*, COM(2008) 763 final, 20.11.2008.

⁷ Council conclusions on Arctic issues, 2985th Foreign Affairs Council meeting, 8 December 2009.

⁸ Resolution of the European Parliament on *A sustainable EU policy for the High North*, 20.1.2011.

3. Background

3.1 Key features of the Arctic region

The area between the North Pole and the Arctic Circle (lat. 66° 33' 44") is generally known as the Arctic region, which is a good definition.

3.1.1 Most of this region consists of the Arctic Ocean, which is mostly covered in ice – the North Pole is located in the middle of the Ocean. The Barents Sea, the Kara Sea, the Greenland Sea, the Norwegian Sea, the Beaufort Sea, the Laptev Sea and certain other named sea regions are all part of the Arctic Ocean. The Arctic Ocean is surrounded by continental shelves. Eight Arctic states – Canada, Denmark (including Greenland), Finland, Norway (including Svalbard), Russia, Sweden and the United States (including Alaska) – are partly situated north of the Arctic Circle and have large amounts of Arctic territory. Iceland just touches the Arctic Circle. At least five of these countries – Norway, Russia, Canada, Denmark/Greenland and the United States (the "Arctic Five") – have a coast on the Arctic Ocean. The Arctic states include three EU Member States: Finland, Sweden and Denmark. Norway and Iceland are non-EU parties to the EEA, while Iceland has applied for EU membership. The United States, Russia and Canada are strategic partners of the EU. Greenland is part of Denmark but has enjoyed far-reaching self-rule since 2009; it is not part of the EU but does have a partnership agreement with it.

3.1.2 The Arctic covers 14.5 million km² and has a population of around 4 million people (most of them in Russia), some 10% of whom belong to indigenous groups (e.g. Sami, Inuit, Nenets, Aleut, Athabascans and Gwich'in). The Sami of Finland and Sweden are the only indigenous people living within the borders of the EU. Murmansk, situated in the northwest of Russia, is the Arctic's largest port⁹. The region has functioning communities and community planning, one example of which is the Regional Council of Lapland's rural development programme for 2014-2020¹⁰. Agriculture, forestry, fur farming and different forms of business suited to the Arctic's harsh climate are also practised in the region¹¹.

3.2 Key challenges in the Arctic region

3.2.1 The Arctic has traditionally been a stable region, and co-existence between the Arctic states is based on constructive cooperation and trust. The Arctic has an important geopolitical status, and interest in the region has grown considerably in recent decades in the Arctic states, in Europe and around the world. For various reasons, the region is undergoing a period of profound change.

⁹ For an up-to-date overview of the Arctic region and its governance, see *Arctic Governance: balancing challenges and development*, Regional Briefing, European Parliament, DG for External Policies of the Union, Policy Department. Fernando Garcés de los Fayos, DG EXPO/B/polDep/Note/2012_136, June 2012.

¹⁰ www.lapinliitto.fi.

¹¹ For example, <http://www.arcticbusinessforum.org>.

- 3.2.2 Worldwide anthropogenic **climate change, mainly global warming**, is exceptionally significant and rapid in the Arctic. It is causing the **ice sheet to melt and the permafrost to thaw**, which in turn is speeding up the greenhouse gas effect worldwide (partly due to release of methane gas). The greenhouse gas effect is causing extreme weather conditions to increase, shifts in wind and ocean currents, rising sea levels, increasing incidence of prolonged drought, and heavy rain and snow falls in different parts of the world. Melting ice, particularly in the Antarctic and Greenland, may cause sea levels to rise by 1-2 metres. By September 2012 the Arctic ice sheet had shrunk by a record amount (to 3.41 million km²). Ground ice in particular is melting rapidly (around 70% has melted since 1980) and is being replaced with thin ice that lasts a year. In summer 2008 the Arctic Ocean was 65% ice-free, and large parts of it may largely melt in the next few decades¹².
- 3.2.3 The region contains **vast, untapped natural resources** both in the ocean and on land. An ice sheet that is thinning and shrinking due to atmospheric warming, coupled with the development and deployment of new technologies, is multiplying opportunities to explore for and extract new hydrocarbon (oil, gas) and other deep-sea raw material deposits. For instance, a quarter of the world's identified gas deposits and 80% of Russia's identified natural gas deposits are in the Arctic. It is estimated that 13% of the world's undiscovered oil deposits, 30% of undiscovered gas deposits, and 20% of liquid gas deposits are to be found in the region.
- 3.2.4 Most of the world's largest oil and gas companies operate in the Arctic, there are already countless off-shore oil drilling sites, and new sites even further north are being sought and investigated (for example, Norway has 89 sites in the Barents Sea and will soon begin drilling at nine new sites). The increasing importance of shale energy does not make these sources any less attractive.
- 3.2.5 For some decades now there has been extensive mining of metals and minerals in different parts of the Arctic, which contains substantial untapped deposits. For example, 90% of the EU's iron ore output and about 20% of the world's nickel output comes from the Arctic, mainly from the Barents region. The Arctic also has significant amounts of forest, a key renewable natural resource.
- 3.2.6 Around a quarter of the world's **fish stocks** are in the Arctic. Rising water temperatures are having an impact on fish movements, which in turn affects fishing. Fishing is moving further and further north to previously unexploited waters.
- 3.2.7 As the ice sheet becomes increasingly fragile and atmospheric temperatures rise, there are growing opportunities to open up/develop **new shipping routes (the Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route)** through the Arctic Ocean to and from East Asia, routes that are

¹² Arctic Impact Assessment, ACIA.

about 40% shorter than existing sea routes to countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean and to Asian coastal states. This will both substantially cut the cost of traffic in transit and reduce its carbon emissions. A significant proportion of the world's ocean freight is carried on EU vessels, and around 90% of the world's ocean freight currently travels along the traditional, southern sea route. In 2012, forty-six ships travelled via the Northern Sea Route from the Barents Sea to the Bering Strait. Freight traffic is increasing, even though there are still major uncertainties surrounding use of the route, mostly in terms of navigation rules, costs, security and the extreme weather conditions in the region.

- 3.2.8 The **economic potential** is huge, and the Arctic could develop into a key region for the world economy due to its energy and raw material resources and its new maritime transport routes.
- 3.2.9 The environmental conditions in the Arctic are unique, and its **ecosystem is fragile and vulnerable**. Efforts to improve management of environmental changes and prevent man-made environmental disasters resulting from economic activity (oil spills, etc.) are a key priority in regional cooperation.
- 3.2.10 These changes have an impact on the living conditions of indigenous peoples and others living in the Arctic and in neighbouring regions. Changing weather and environmental conditions, clear economic opportunities and growing geopolitical and security interests are also affecting people's lives elsewhere in Europe and around the world.
- 3.2.11 Finding a strategic balance in the Arctic between threats and opportunities can be considered critical for the future of the entire world.

4. **Key political players in the Arctic**

- 4.1 All **eight Arctic states** have their own Arctic strategy¹³. They largely focus on similar priorities: the political and economic significance of the Arctic to them; the country's specific position in the region; natural conditions and the ecosystem; and the need to cooperate to develop governance of the region in a sustainable manner. All of the strategies take as a key starting-point the Arctic region's potential in terms of energy, raw materials and development of transit routes. The states have also forged bilateral relations with each other to protect and promote their common interests in the Arctic. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly issued a resolution on the Arctic in October 2012¹⁴.

13 **Norway:** *The High North: visions and strategies*, 2011; **Russia:** *The Russian Federation's main state policy in the Arctic until 2020 and beyond*, 2008; **Canada:** *Canada's Northern Strategy: Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future*, 2009; **Sweden:** *The Arctic: Sweden's strategy for the region*, 2012; **USA:** *US: Arctic Region Policy*, 2009; **Finland:** *Finland's Strategy for the Arctic Region*, 2010, to be updated in April 2013; **Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands:** *Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020*, 2011; **Iceland:** <http://www.utanrikisraduneyti.is>

14 NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Resolution 396.

4.2 There are four regional cooperation forums in the North:

The **Arctic Council**¹⁵ is the most important instrument of regional cooperation, and has eight members (the Arctic states, including the Faroe Islands and Greenland as dependencies of Denmark), six permanent participants (the forums for cooperation between the indigenous peoples of the Arctic countries)¹⁶, and a large number of observers (the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, Poland, France, Germany and 18 intergovernmental organisations and NGOs). The EU, Italy, China, India, South Korea and Singapore have requested the right to be permanent observers. In recent years China has substantially increased its activity in relation to the Arctic region and to countries in the region. The member states of the Arctic Council have concluded agreements such as the maritime search and rescue agreement. There are efforts to give the Council a more important role, with wider jurisdiction and more clout as an instrument of international cooperation.

4.3 **The Barents Euro-Arctic Council**¹⁷ covers European Arctic and sub-Arctic regions. It promotes cooperation in the resource-rich Barents region, which needs better transport routes to European markets and elsewhere. The Council has seven members: Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Russia and the European Commission. The Council also hosts the **Barents Regional Council (BRC)**¹⁸, which includes Barents' 13 sub-regions and which works to facilitate pragmatic cooperation.

4.4 The **Nordic Council of Ministers**¹⁹ (and the Nordic Council) has its own Arctic strategy. In the five Nordic countries, there has traditionally been close and far-reaching cooperation among themselves, as well as competence and expertise on northern conditions. Greenland takes part in this cooperation as a full member.

4.5 The **Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS)**²⁰ maintains cooperation between the eight countries in the Baltic Sea region. The EU has its own **macro-regional Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)**.

4.6 The **Northern Dimension**²¹, which is a common policy of the EU, Iceland, Norway and Russia, covers a large geographical area including Europe's Arctic and sub-Arctic regions from northwest Russia in the east to Iceland and Greenland in the west. Cooperation is based on four thematic Partnerships (NDEP, NDPHS, NDPTL and NDPC) and a separate Arctic

15 www.arctic-council.org.

16 The Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples Secretariat (IPS), www.arcticpeoples.org.

17 www.beac.st.

18 www.beac.st.

19 www.norden.org.

20 www.cbss.org.

21 http://eeas.europa.eu/north_dim/index_en.htm.

Window. The Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL), under which a proposal for a regional transport network is currently being developed, is important in terms of Arctic cooperation. The Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) also plays a pivotal role in the Arctic, not least because it provided a framework for successfully cleaning up radioactive waste in the Kola Peninsula. The third meeting of Northern Dimension foreign ministers was held in February 2013 in Brussels²². The Northern Dimension Business Council²³ primarily works to improve investment conditions in the region and make it more competitive. The United States and Canada hold observer status at ND meetings.

- 4.7 Parliamentarians in Arctic region countries participate in all of the aforementioned cooperation forums, and also cooperate regularly through the **Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region** (CPAR).
- 4.8 The six **cooperation forums for the region's indigenous peoples** maintain regular cooperation.
- 4.9 The **International Polar Foundation** (IPF) maintains international cooperation between parties interested in Arctic issues, and in September 2012 it organised the Arctic Future Symposium 2012 at the headquarters of the Committee of the Regions.

5. **Guidelines for regional cooperation**

- 5.1 Cooperation on issues concerning the Arctic region is built as far as possible **on international agreements** and **within international forums**.
- 5.2 The most important international agreement concerning the Arctic region is the **1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea** (UNCLOS)²⁴, which deals with ocean and sea areas between independent states, and under which the **Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf** (CLCS) was set up.
- 5.3 Through these agreements the states bordering the Arctic Ocean have sought to reach a common understanding on the limits of their regional territorial waters and exclusive economic zones (including 200 nautical miles beyond the continental shelf). Efforts are made to avoid territorial disputes, but some geographical points of contention are unresolved. There is a risk that disputes could escalate. In 2008 the coastal states agreed on a joint declaration in Ilulissat, Greenland underscoring the sovereign right of all the signatory countries to regulate activity within their own exclusive economic zone.

22 www.consilium.europa.eu 6597/13.

23 <http://www.northerndimension.info/component/content/article/10-innerpage/9-ndbc>.

24 www.UN.org.

- 5.4 Development of potential shipping lanes – the Northwest Passage (which passes through Canada's exclusive economic zone) and the Northern Sea Route (which passes through Russia's exclusive economic zone) – as well as the facilities, conditions and security for using them are being extensively studied and discussed in various cooperation forums. The aim is to achieve the best possible shared understanding between parties of the principles governing the use and management of these routes. There are international agreements on the subject, such as the **UNCLOS and International Maritime Organisation's (IMO)**²⁵ agreement on the right of innocent passage, while **work is under way on an IMO Polar Code**.
- 5.5 Issues surrounding climate change and sustainable development are of particular significance in the Arctic. The **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**²⁶ remains a key starting-point for international relations. This would have very important implications for the Arctic as well.

The United Nations Environmental Programme (**UNEP**)²⁷ has launched its own Arctic monitoring programme.

- 5.6 Environmental protection groups are actively involved in this work. **Greenpeace** has proposed that economic activity not be allowed unconditionally in the Arctic without prior agreement on the principles for protecting the region.

6. **EU activity and evolving Arctic policy**

- 6.1 The EU has substantial and ever-increasing geopolitical, environmental and economic interests in the Arctic. The EU is a party to cooperation in the region, not least because of its Arctic Member States.

- 6.2 **The EU's Arctic policy is still taking shape.** It gained impetus in 2008, mainly at the initiative of the European Parliament²⁸. The Commission has issued two communications (in 2008 and 2012) on the matter (see footnotes 2 and 7). The Council of Ministers has issued two resolutions (in 2008 and 2009)²⁹. The Council discussed the present situation at its meeting of 31 January 2013.

- 6.3 **In 2008 and June 2012 the EU announced its intention to pursue a comprehensive approach** to Arctic policy with three key objectives:

– protecting the Arctic environment in cooperation with its population

25 www.imo.org.

26 www.UN.org.

27 www.unep.org.

28 Resolution P6 TA(2008)0474, 9.10.2008.

29 Council conclusions on Arctic issues, 2985th Foreign Affairs Council meeting, 8 December 2009. See also: footnote 9.

- promoting sustainable use of natural resources
- promoting international cooperation, with emphasis on the importance of international agreements.

The policy today is based on three focal areas: knowledge, responsibility, engagement.

6.4 The EU's bilateral relations with the Arctic countries include cooperation in the region. The EU has a separate agreement with Greenland, and the multilateral Northern Dimension also plays a key role in the Arctic.

6.5 **Many existing EU programmes can also be applied to the Arctic region.** Over the course of 2007-2013, the EU has invested around EUR 1.4 billion to promote sustainable development in the Arctic and in neighbouring regions. Scientific research cooperation has taken priority: the sixth framework agreement for research which began in 2002 included Arctic-related projects. In recent years the EU has invested over EUR 200 million in Arctic-related research, and it is involved in many joint projects, mainly as part of its **Seventh Framework Programme for Research**³⁰. There is a well-functioning network facilitating cooperation between the various research institutes (both in the EU and elsewhere). The key research projects for 2008-2012 and funding programmes for regional cooperation for 2007-2013 have been listed³¹. A number of projects have been carried out in the Arctic under the EU's regional policy, its Interreg and ETC programmes, its Regional Aid Guidelines (RAG) and its European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The Connecting Europe Facility and TEN-T do not extend to the Arctic.

The European Commission recently decided to investigate how information on Arctic research should be organised in the EU. An EU Arctic Information Centre is being considered.

6.6 The EU is a party to the Northern Dimension and a member of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. It is an ad hoc observer in the Arctic Council and has applied for permanent observer status. The EU has been a full participant in the activities of the Council's various Working Groups for some years now.

6.7 Members of the European Parliament attend the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (CPAR) (see point 3.3.7) and take part in parliamentary cooperation of the North's four regional councils and the Northern Dimension. The European Parliament has issued two resolutions on the Arctic (in 2008 and 2011) (See footnote 9 and P6_TA(2008)0474).

³⁰ The Seventh Framework Programme for Research.

³¹ SWD(2012) 182, Annex I, and European Territorial Cooperation, Annex II.

- 6.8 The EU has launched a regular dialogue with organisations in the region representing indigenous peoples and other civil society groups, and participates in the activities of the International Polar Foundation (IPF).
- 6.9 The EESC has issued opinions with a bearing on Arctic cooperation, including opinions on the Northern Dimension, regional and maritime policy, sustainable development and relations with neighbouring countries. The EESC has institutional relations with civil society in Norway, Iceland and Russia (through the EEA-CC, the Iceland JCC, and the CCRF), and has organised two Northern Dimension forums for civil society (in 2002 and 2006) as well as a stakeholder meeting in connection with the Northern Dimension Ministerial meeting in February 2013.

Brussels, 17 April 2013

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Henri Malosse
