EU Arctic policy

The European Union has an important role to play in supporting successful Arctic cooperation and helping to meet the challenges now facing the region.

The vast region referred to as the Arctic is located at the northernmost part of the planet (the polar circle runs at 66°N). There is no single geographical definition of the Arctic: in fact, the Arctic can be defined in different ways (see further information under ‘Other Matters’).

There are eight Arctic states: Canada; the Kingdom of Denmark (Denmark, Greenland, Faroe Islands); Finland; Iceland; Norway; the Russian Federation; Sweden; and the United States of America. All the Arctic states have adopted national Arctic policy papers or strategies.

The Arctic is estimated to be inhabited by some 4 million people. Present estimates suggest that indigenous peoples account for about 10% of the total population living in Arctic areas; this proportion varies considerably across the Arctic region. There are over 40 different peoples living in the Arctic.

The Arctic is marked by several weeks or months of darkness during part of the year, and weeks or months of light during another part of the year. The climate is harsh, distances are vast, and the population is sparse. In many respects, life in the Arctic is considered to be very challenging and marked by a scarcity of resources. However, despite the extreme conditions, terrestrial, subterranean and marine areas host abundant resources such as flora and fauna (over 21,000 known species, some of which are completely endemic) as well as hydrocarbons and minerals.

In addition to the ongoing activities of the states and inhabitants of the Arctic, the region is experiencing increasing interest from around the world, such as from scientists, environmental protection groups, tourists and businesses interested in hydrocarbon and mineral exploration, fisheries, transport, telecommunications infrastructure etc. The interests of indigenous peoples are also wide-ranging and include traditional knowledge and cultural activities, reindeer herding, fishing, hunting etc.

It goes without saying that the Arctic states have primary responsibility for tackling issues within their territories. However, many issues affecting the Arctic region can be more effectively addressed through regional or multilateral cooperation.

EU engagement in Arctic matters is important in the interest of the citizens of the EU and of the EU Member States, not least those who are located in the Arctic.
The Arctic webpage

On this webpage, you will find material relating to the EU Arctic policy. The webpage covers activities of the Directorates-General (DGs) of the European Commission and relevant agencies, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and relevant EU delegations. The material found on this webpage reflects material that is also available on the individual webpages of the contributing services.

- The Arctic webpage follows the structure of the Joint Communication on an integrated EU policy for the Arctic, published by the European Commission and the High Representative on 27 April 2016.
- The Council of the European Union adopted conclusions about the EU Arctic policy at its session on 20 June 2016.
- The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted an opinion on the EU Arctic policy at its plenary on 14 December 2016.
- The Committee of the Regions (CoR) adopted an opinion on the EU Arctic policy on 8 February 2017.
- The European Parliament (EP) adopted a resolution on an integrated European Union policy for the Arctic at its plenary session on 16 March 2017.

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