

Opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2016/17:UU6

An integrated EU policy for the Arctic

Summary

The Committee welcomes the Communication from the Commission and the High Representative on future EU involvement in the Arctic. The Committee supports the EU's continued efforts to develop a balanced and coherent policy for the Arctic. The Committee proposes that the Riksdag take note of this opinion.

Building on previous initiatives, the Joint Communication sets out the case for an EU policy that focuses on advancing international cooperation in responding to the impacts of climate change on the Arctic's fragile environment, and on promoting and contributing to sustainable development, particularly in the European part of the Arctic. The Communication describes the EU's current relationship with the Arctic and its role and interest there. It contains proposals for strategic short-term and long-term objectives for policy areas in which developments in the Arctic are relevant for the EU. In the Communication, the Commission and the High Representative point to the following three key strategic objectives and priority policy areas for an integrated EU policy for the Arctic:

- climate change and safeguarding the Arctic environment;
- sustainable development in and around the Arctic;
- international cooperation on Arctic issues.

Document examined

Joint Communication JOIN(2016) 21 An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic.

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The Committee's proposal for a decision by the Riksdag

An integrated EU policy for the Arctic

The Riksdag takes note of the Committee's opinion.

Stockholm 27 October 2016

On behalf of the Committee

Kenneth G Forslund

The following members participated in the decision: Kenneth G Forslund (Social Democratic Party), Karin Enström (Moderate Party), Sofia Arkelsten (Moderate Party), Markus Wiechel (Sweden Democrats), Kerstin Lundgren (Centre Party), Pernilla Stålhammar (Green Party), Göran Pettersson (Moderate Party), Björn Söder (Sweden Democrats), Birgitta Ohlsson (Liberal Party), Hans Linde (Left Party), Sofia Damm (Christian Democrats), Maria Andersson Willner (Social Democratic Party), Emilia Töyrä (Social Democratic Party), Sotiris Delis (Moderate Party), Anders Österberg (Social Democratic Party), Jamal Mouneimne (Social Democratic Party) and Åsa Eriksson (Social Democratic Party).

Description of the item

The item and its preparation

In this opinion, the Committee deals with the Commission's and High Representative's Joint Communication JOIN (2016) 21, An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic. The document was adopted by the Commission on 27 April 2016 and was received by the Riksdag on 28 April 2016.

Following a decision by the Speaker in consultation with the leaders of the party groups, the Communication was referred to the Foreign Affairs Committee for examination on 26 April.

The Government provided information on the draft Council conclusions on the Communication on 16 June, ahead of the Foreign Affairs Council meeting of 20 June. The Council conclusions on the Communication were adopted by the FAC on 20 June 2016.

A memorandum concerning the Communication (2015/16:FPM89) was received by the Riksdag on 1 June and notified to the Chamber on 7 June. The Memorandum sets out the Government's preliminary views on the content of the Communication concerning European Union Policy for the Arctic.

The Communication was presented to the Foreign Affairs Committee at its meeting on 16 June. The Committee noted in the minutes on that date that the Communication would be the subject of an opinion in autumn 2016. The State Secretary for Foreign Affairs addressed the Committee on the subject on 13 October.

Background

Building on previous initiatives, the Joint Communication sets out the case for an EU policy that focuses on advancing international cooperation in responding to the impacts of climate change on the Arctic's fragile environment, and on promoting and contributing to sustainable development, particularly in the European part of the Arctic. The Commission launched its work on an EU policy for the Arctic via a Communication in 2008 (COM (2008) 763), which was covered in opinion No 2009/10:UU4. A second Communication on EU Arctic policy, which was not dealt with by the Riksdag, was presented in 2012 (JOIN (2012) 19). In 2014, the Council and the European Parliament invited the Commission and the High Representative to draw up an integrated strategy for issues relating to the Arctic, and to develop a more coherent framework for EU action and funding programmes.

Main content of the Communication

The Communication describes the EU's current relationship with, importance for and interest in the Arctic. It contains proposed strategic short-term and long-term objectives for policy areas in which developments in the Arctic are relevant for the EU. In the Communication, the Commission and the High Representative set out the following three key strategic objectives and priority policy areas for an integrated EU policy for the Arctic:

- climate change and safeguarding the Arctic environment;
- sustainable development in and around the Arctic;
- international cooperation on Arctic issues.

The Communication also stresses the importance of the EU's acting to facilitate cooperation between Member States on Arctic issues, since this is necessary if the EU is to be able to effectively deal with the challenges posed by, above all, climate change.

The Communication also states that the EU should attach particular importance to research, science and innovation within all three priority areas. Action should contribute to the implementation of Agenda 2030 and be in line with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN in September 2015.

The Communication's priority areas

Climate change and safeguarding the Arctic environment

The effects of climate change in the Arctic have become increasingly tangible and prominent. Climate change is visible first, and most clearly, north of the Arctic Circle, since warming is taking place in the Arctic twice as fast as the average global rate. The melting of land and sea ice, and emissions and pollution, are creating negative feedback loops which are posing great difficulties for the region's fragile and irreplaceable ecosystems.

As regards research as a means of solving the problems of climate change, the Communication states that a better understanding of the developments in the region is fundamental to the EU response. Research is a key part of the support process, but despite a number of completed research projects and programmes to observe and monitor the Arctic, there are still major gaps in knowledge of Arctic systems. The EU intends, therefore, in the next decade, to allocate the equivalent of EUR 200 million to Arctic research under the Horizon 2020 programme. Under the 2016–2017 Work Programme, the EU has already committed EUR 30 million to Arctic-related research, which will focus on an integrated observation system, studying the impact of Arctic changes on the weather and climate of the northern hemisphere and the effect of climate change on Arctic permafrost and its socio-economic impact. A central plank of the EU's Arctic research efforts is the EU-PolarNet initiative, which supports an EU-wide consortium of expertise and infrastructure for polar research to better assimilate Europe's research capabilities

in the Polar regions. EU research into climate change in the Arctic will also be supported by the EU space programme Copernicus. The Commission will also support the implementation of the Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System, which will contribute to future pan-Arctic monitoring.

In terms of climate mitigation and adaptation and strategies to limit global average temperature increases to well below 2 degrees in accordance with the Paris Agreement, the EU's objective is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 % by 2030 and 80–95 % by 2050, compared with 1990 levels. The EU has also committed to spending 20 % of its total budget on climate-related objectives and to contribute to international efforts to limit the impact of short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon and methane in the Arctic and to limit the use of environmental pollutants such as heavy metals.

As concerns environmental protection, the EU's multilateral environmental agreements such as the Stockholm Convention and the Minamata Convention are mentioned. The Communication stresses the importance of these being ratified and implemented in order to reduce emissions of pollutants. The Communication also mentions the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the obligations of states, pursuant to it, to protect and preserve the maritime environment. It also recommends that marine protection areas be created in the Arctic and that an instrument be developed under UNCLOS to preserve marine diversity also in areas outside national jurisdiction. As regards activities related to oil and gas extraction, it is proposed that the EU should work closely with the Member States and other stakeholders to adopt the highest standards of major accident prevention and environmental control.

Sustainable development in and around the Arctic

Sustainable development faces particular challenges in the Arctic region. Compared with other parts of Europe, the European part of the Arctic has a sparse population spread over a wide area and is characterised by a lack of transport links. The lack of terrestrial communications means that space infrastructure has an increasingly important role to play in connecting people and businesses, and meeting the educational, health, linguistic and cultural needs of Arctic communities.

As regards support for sustainable innovation, the Communication states that the EU should support the deployment of innovative technologies in the Arctic by taking into account both traditional knowledge of the region's population and the effects of economic development on the sensitive Arctic environment.

Horizon 2020 could speed up the translation of research outcomes into cold-climate technologies and services with commercial potential. The Investment Plan for Europe could be used to support infrastructure projects in the European part of the Arctic. Projects to improve transport connections over land, sea and air could be financed via the EU's structural and investment funds and the European Investment Bank (EIB). Telecommunications, energy efficiency projects and low-carbon technology could also be financed in this way.

The Communication furthermore states that the EU institutions, Member States, third countries and industry should cooperate to create an optimal, sustainable mix between the different transport modes for both long and short distance, passenger and freight traffic. In order to obtain the optimal use of the network, a coordinated financing strategy should also be considered. The Arctic region can benefit greatly from space-based services. The Arctic region, however, needs dedicated solutions as it is not covered by geostationary satellites. The Commission will explore whether a suitable solution for the Arctic could be considered as part of a possible proposal to support the next generation of Government satellite communications in the context of the upcoming Space Strategy or European Defence Action Plan. The EU will also promote an integrated pan-Arctic observing system through the GEO Cold Region Initiative as an essential tool to study, forecast and assess changes that support the region's sustainable development.

The Commission will set up a European Arctic stakeholder forum with the aim of enhancing collaboration and coordination between different EU funding programmes.

In view of increasing vessel traffic in the Arctic, the EU should contribute to enhancing the safety of navigation in the Arctic. The European Commission is to launch a call under Horizon 2020 to prepare a network for the Arctic and the Atlantic that is to cope with maritime security threats resulting from the opening of the North East passage. The EU should also support international efforts to implement the International Polar Code. The European Coast Guard Functions Forum (ECGFF) should collaborate closely with the newly established Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF), which could play an important role in fostering safe, secure and environmentally responsible maritime activity in the Arctic.

International cooperation on Arctic issues.

Since the Arctic is a region experiencing changes, the Communication states that the challenges and opportunities afforded by change also highlight the importance of the region's remaining a zone of constructive international cooperation. Greater competition for resources and increasing economic activity have the potential to increase tensions in the region. Growth and prosperity depend on continued constructive international cooperation in the region. Science, in particular, is mentioned in the Communication as a catalyst for cooperation. The EU should take an active negotiating position in relevant UN fora to encourage all countries and regions to assume their responsibilities, notably with regard to climate change and environmental protection, but also in relation to emerging challenges such as safety at sea and the sustainable management of land- and sea-based resources.

The Communication emphasises the importance of ensuring that appropriate measures are in place for effective stewardship of the Arctic Ocean to ensure environmental protection, respect for international law and the sustainable use of marine resources. The EU emphasises its support for UNCLOS as a framework for the management of the Arctic Ocean. The Communication stresses the need of a

solid framework for good management of the Arctic Ocean in areas outside national jurisdiction, since the existing agreements are not sufficient.

The Communication emphasises that the EU should cooperate with all Arctic partners, including Canada, Russia and the United States with a view to identifying further areas for cooperation, such as science and investment. The Communication confirms the EU's continued active participation in the Arctic Council and welcomes early implementation of its observer status in line with the Kiruna Declaration. The EU will continue to support regional cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Northern Dimension, and will also work for deeper bilateral cooperation with countries such as Canada, Russia and the United States. The Communication also states that the EU will also engage with the observer states China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Singapore.

The EU will continue to engage with Arctic indigenous peoples and local communities to ensure that their views and rights are respected and promoted in the ongoing development of EU policies affecting the Arctic. The EU should continue to work on advancing consistency between the EU's internal and external policy towards indigenous peoples.

As regards fisheries management, the Communication emphasises the need of a new Regional Fisheries Management Organisation or Arrangement, in combination with a new Regional Sea Convention, to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of resources in the Arctic high seas.

As regards scientific cooperation, the EU should promote and facilitate effective international scientific cooperation by supporting transnational access to research infrastructure and open data resources to improve political and economic links and maintain good relations with key countries in the region.

Scrutiny by the Committee

The Arctic has a unique environment that is sensitive to environmental impact. The environment in the Arctic is affected by emissions from distant areas and is highly affected by ongoing climate change. Climate change in the Arctic is a threat not only to the Arctic environment and the people living there, however, but is also global in its impact. There are a number of reasons why the Arctic must be protected: to slow the pace of global climate change, prevent harmful emissions, protect threatened species and safeguard the traditional lifestyles of indigenous peoples. The Committee considers, therefore, that it is important that in its decision-making, the EU takes into account and pays particular attention to the unique conditions of the Arctic. It is in the interest of both the EU and Sweden to ensure that the Arctic remains an area characterised by cooperation based on international law, solid scientific research the traditional and local knowledge of the region's indigenous peoples and local communities.

The Committee notes that the Government adopted a Strategy for the Arctic Region in May 2011. The Strategy sets out main priorities in three thematic areas: climate and the environment, economic development and the human dimension. In January 2016, the Government presented a new approach to environmental policy in the Arctic. Within this framework, the Government wishes to see greater efforts in the Arctic Council concerning climate and renewable energy, greater legal protection for the sensitive Arctic environment and robust regulation which ensures the highest level of protection when drilling for oil in the Arctic, and work aiming towards the establishment of institutions which will ensure that fishing in the Arctic is sustainable.

With respect to the extraction of natural resources in the Arctic, the Committee notes (see Report 2015/16:UU11) that the Arctic coastal states have sovereign rights to extract and search for natural resources in the seas where they have national jurisdiction. Their national laws apply there, which means that it is Denmark, the United States, Iceland, Canada, Norway and Russia which decide on the potential extraction of natural resources in the Arctic in their respective territories.

The Committee shares the Government's view, as set out in its Memorandum, that there is need of greater protection of waters outside national jurisdiction, also in the Arctic. Like the Government, the Committee wishes to see an implementing agreement to UNCLOS with the overall objective of protecting and preserving marine biodiversity in areas outside national jurisdiction, something which the Committee stated in its Report 2015/2016:UU11. It is positive that the Communication emphasises the need to improve the balance between conservation and utilisation of biodiversity, i.e. ecosystem-based management of the marine environment. The Committee also welcomes the declaration signed by the five coastal states concerning a moratorium for commercial fishing in the northern Arctic Ocean.

The melting of the ice sheets opens up new opportunities for transport, mineral extraction and other commercial activity, which, in the long run, might impact on international stability and European security interests. The Committee would emphasise, therefore, that the EU has a responsibility to work to prevent situations arising which may cause international tension in the Arctic.

The Committee notes the EU's position to encourage national ratification of the International Polar Code¹. On a number of occasions², the Committee has stressed how important it is that Sweden and the EU are active in relevant international fora in order to protect the unique environment of the Arctic and minimise the negative impact and risks of the expected increased extraction of natural resources and maritime transport, and the Committee will continue to monitor the issue.

The Committee agrees that EU institutions, the Member States, third countries and industry should cooperate on the development of an optimal, sustainable mix of modes of transport, on the development of coordinated financial strategies for the trans-European transport network and the next generation of satellite communication within the framework of the forthcoming Space Strategy.

The Committee welcomes the fact that the Communication emphasises the importance of research, science and innovation as tools to protect the Arctic. The Committee welcomes an increased focus on the extensive academic research cooperation which has been under way in the Arctic for a long time.

The Committee notes that the EU has chosen a broad approach which focuses on the definition of the Arctic as the area north of the Arctic Circle which includes both land and sea areas in the eight Arctic states.

Like the Government, the Committee notes that the Communication strikes a good balance between land and sea, and between environment and sustainable economic development.

The Committee welcomes the emphasis on continued engagement from the EU with Arctic indigenous peoples and local communities. Their participation is essential, as is respect for their views and rights, in the ongoing development of EU policies affecting the Arctic.

The Committee welcomes the EU's continued willingness to actively participate in the Arctic Council, which is the most important forum for international cooperation in the region, and notes the EU's wish for cooperation with the current and future Presidencies of the Arctic Council, and early implementation of the EU's application for observer status in accordance with the Kiruna Declaration of May 2013.

The Committee welcomes the fact that other regional bodies, such as the Barents-Arctic Council and the Northern Dimension, are mentioned. The Committee notes, however, the lack of reference to inter-parliamentary cooperation, cooperation between NGOs and cooperation between other stakeholders in the Arctic. Like the Government, the Committee has its doubts

¹ International codes for vessels operating in Arctic waters.
<http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/hottopics/polar/pages/default.aspx>.

² Reports 2012/13:UU3, 2013/14:UU14 and 2015/16:UU11.

about the Commission's and the High Representative's proposal to the Council to consider the need to establish a new Working Group on Arctic issues and northern cooperation.

In brief, the Committee welcomes the Commission's and the High Representative's Communication on future EU involvement in the Arctic. The Committee supports the EU's continued efforts to develop a balanced and coherent policy for the Arctic.

Separate declarations

1. An integrated EU policy for the Arctic (Sweden Democrats)

Markus Wiechel (Sweden Democrats) and Bjöm Söder (Sweden Democrats) state as follows:

The Sweden Democrats welcome greater international engagement and cooperation to ensure the safe, secure and environmentally-friendly conservation of Arctic biotopes, extraction of Arctic natural resources, and security and safety of Arctic shipping routes. A common European strategy is becoming increasingly important as the region grows in commercial importance. Although we largely agree with the material content of the Commission's approach, we cannot support it because it was drawn up by the EEAS. The EEAS is an important step towards the federalisation of the EU and is something that the Swedish people have never been allowed a vote on. It is also questionable how suitable the EU, as an institution, is with respect to the development of Arctic policy, since so few Member States have territories north of the Arctic Circle and in view of the fact that Norway is not a member. Our view is that a common European strategy should be able to be developed at intergovernmental level, through the adoption of binding treaties which can be negotiated under the auspices of e.g. the Arctic Council. Such a model could also potentially include other members of the Arctic Council.

2. An integrated EU policy for the Arctic (Centre Party)

Kerstin Lundgren (Centre Party) states as follows:

The EU's clear willingness to engage in the protection of the Arctic environment, promote sustainable development in and around the Arctic and strengthen international cooperation is welcome. The Centre Party has noted that the Government's new approach to the Arctic from 2016 consisted only of a memorandum, and could not be regarded as any sort of plan of action. It is important that Sweden is an active participant in the Arctic Council and ensures that there is a clear plan of action for this.

As regards the protection of the Arctic, it is necessary to ensure that no oil extraction takes place in the most sensitive marine environments and that they are not threatened by oil extraction. It is also important to put in place a binding action plan for how the protection of the Arctic environment is to be strengthened. Here, the EU's willingness to shape frameworks outside national jurisdiction should be welcomed, even if "solid" management must be about the sustainable management of the highly sensitive environment.

3. An integrated EU policy for the Arctic (Left Party)

Hans Linde (Left Party) states as follows:

According to estimates, a third of the world's as yet undiscovered natural gas reserves and just over 10 % of the world's oil reserves are in the Arctic. The previous centre-right government often emphasised the commercial opportunities that climate change is creating in the Arctic. Among other things, they wrote in their Arctic Strategy that "Norwegian and Russian extraction of oil and gas reserves in the Barents region over the next 10–15 years open up opportunities for Swedish companies in the areas of mining and petroleum". The Left Party welcomes the fact that the current Government has chosen a different approach to the Arctic, putting a completely different emphasis on environmental, climate and sustainability issues. The European Commission's Communication "An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic" also emphasises the importance of sustainable development, of combating climate change and of safeguarding the fragile Arctic ecosystems and the rights of indigenous peoples. At the same time, it emphasises the potential of extracting natural resources from the Arctic.

The Left Party takes the view that Sweden and the EU must act with even more clarity to prevent the exploitation of the Arctic oil and gas finds. Exploitation will lead to greater reserves of non-renewable energy sources, enabling continued, and increasing, CO₂ emissions; additionally, there is a great risk that the exploitation of these natural resources will lead to major environmental problems in the region, related to both extraction and transport. In that context, it is worth noting that the Antarctic is covered by an environmental protection protocol which prohibits the extraction of natural resources for at least 50 years. A similar regulatory framework is needed for the Arctic. The Left Party thinks that Sweden should push for a convention for the Arctic which will prohibit the extraction of the region's oil and gas reserves for the next 100 years. Pending the existence of such a convention, Sweden should push for a moratorium on oil and gas extraction in the Arctic.

ANNEX

List of documents examined

Joint Communication JOIN(2016) 21 An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic.