

Maria Damanaki

Member of the European Commission
Responsible for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

**Working together for a bright future for
the Arctic**

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Arctic Futures Symposium

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Your Serene Highness, President Van Rompuy, Vice President Durant, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Arctic finds itself at a crossroads. We need to understand fully the tremendous changes that the region is undergoing and that need to be addressed.

I do believe that the European Union has a key role to play in this region.

- Three EU Member States are partly located in the Arctic. In the case of Denmark, Greenland is an Arctic overseas territory outside the EU with strong ties to the EU.
- As members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Norway are closely associated with the EU and apply many parts of EU law. The ongoing accession negotiations with Iceland are broadening the EU's Arctic dimension.
- These two countries are also partners in the Northern Dimension Policy, along with Russia and the EU.
- Russia itself, Canada and the United States, are strategic partner for the EU.

All of which points to the EU as a useful and active player in Arctic issues.

So what kind of future can we envisage for the Arctic to which we the Europeans are linked in so many ways?

The European Commission sought to tackle this question in its 2008 Communication on the EU and the Arctic region.

Our approach to developing EU policy on the Arctic is threefold and requires joint action by EU institutions, Member States and Arctic stakeholders.

- 1- Firstly, we want to contribute decisively to the protection and preservation of the Arctic region in unison with the people of the Arctic.

The EU's overriding concern throughout has been for cooperative action with a special emphasis on the involvement of indigenous communities and NGOs. That is why the Commission has hosted a "first Arctic Indigenous Dialogue workshop" with many indigenous representatives in the heart of European Policy, the Berlaymont building in March this year.

Now, the steering committees of various EU funded Arctic research projects strive to involve indigenous representatives. The Commission also aims to strengthen Sami culture and industry by creating opportunities for broader and better structured business cooperation and offers over 4 million euros for funding several projects under Interreg programme.

- 2- Our second goal is to ensure that emerging activities (such as transport and the exploitation of Arctic resources) are subject to the highest environmental and safety standards, while securing fair treatment for EU citizens and enterprises in accessing these activities.

Practical progress on the ground is being made in many EU programmes and projects in the Arctic. Over the last ten years, the EU together with its Member States has become one of the biggest contributors to Arctic research, underlining our dedicated commitment to the Arctic Region. The most recent building block in the area of Arctic research is the joint call 'Ocean of Tomorrow', which addresses the socio-economic dimension of human activities in the Arctic region, for which 11 million euro are reserved.

- 3- Our third goal follows on logically from the first two. It is enhancing governance in the Arctic.

This thinking lies behind the Commission's request for the EU to become a permanent observer at the Arctic Council.

The Council's member States and permanent participants are, of course, absolutely right to carefully scrutinise the contribution that a State or organisation could make to its work. I would suggest that the EU's links with the members of the Arctic Council and its role in such issues as fisheries, trade, research and environmental policy make it a natural partner for the Council. The Commission has already stepped up its participation as an ad hoc observer.

The Commission is also cooperating in the work of the Arctic Council to enhance standards for the cruise ship industry and is financially contributing to the "ArcRisk project" of the Arctic Council. This project studies the influence of climate change on contaminant spreading and the resultant risk to human populations in the Arctic. And I feel that enhanced cooperation in and beyond the Arctic Council is beginning to deliver all-round benefits.

But the financial contribution of the EU goes much beyond the area of research.

The Northern Dimension partnerships and cross-border cooperation programmes dedicated to specific Arctic regions such as "Kolarctic" and "Karelia" provide funding for projects in the Barents region extending to North-West Russia.

While the Arctic engagement of the EU dates back many years, the EU since 2007 has been taking an integrated approach to Maritime policy making that ties together sectoral policies in a coherent way.

This integrated Maritime policy approach has already delivered concrete results all across Europe in terms of coordination of economic activities on the sea through maritime spatial planning, promoting sustainable growth and improving safety at sea.

This policy approach is shared by many of the Arctic States such as the US and Norway and it can deliver good results for the Arctic Ocean as well.

The EU and its Member States are also active players in the ongoing work on a new mandatory "Polar Code", currently being developed in the framework of the International Maritime Organisation. It will provide another substantial building block for Arctic governance in the area of shipping.

Moreover, for many years now the European Parliament has been closely involved in work on the Arctic through its participation in the "Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians".

I can testify to that as I opened the 9th Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians which was hosted by the European Parliament last month here in Brussels.

I am sure that Parliament's resulting experience and expertise will be reflected in its first substantial report on the Arctic in the coming months. This will give us one more building block for a credible and responsible EU Arctic policy.

The Arctic Council and the European Union can do much to create a promising outlook for the Arctic. However, they cannot do so alone. Shaping the Arctic's future lies also in the hands of global civil society.

As public concern about our planet and its environment grows, the International Polar Foundation, the Prince Albert II Foundation and the Aspen Institute have shown their commitment to a bright future for the Arctic in many ways – the latest being today's symposium. We can now hope for a clearer understanding of the implications of global warming for the Arctic's inhabitants and resources. We can also take action successfully to manage future commercial and economic activity in the region.

Your Serene Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We may be at a crossroads, but I am convinced that, over and above the different visions for the future, we can together choose the path towards a bright future for the Arctic – a future of sustainability and respect for its inhabitants.

"The history of Arctic enterprise is stainless as the Arctic snows, clean to the core as an ice mountain" wrote Sir Henry Morley in 1853.

Indeed, the unequalled beauty, fragility and potential of this particular ocean should induce at least some humility in our analysis and decisions.

We must now set about charting that path, through dialogue and cooperation. I am confident that this symposium can help point us in the right direction.