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## **The Arctic: a test bench for international dialogue**

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Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Conference: "Arctic Science, International Law and Climate Protection"

**Berlin, 17 March 2011**

Mr Chairman, distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen,

If the rest of the world is hot from climate change, the Arctic region is burning.

In the Arctic surface temperatures are rising twice as fast as in the rest of the world. Over the past decades, sea ice has been thinning and retreating to record lows of ice surface.

As the ice melts and poses unprecedented ecological risks, new opportunities open up for mankind in transport, trade, fisheries, oil and gas drilling. These opportunities make the Arctic the "new frontier" in economic and political terms.

This dichotomy between economic opportunities and environmental risks is the challenge the international community is facing today. This dichotomy overwhelms all actions of mankind. From the exploitation of resources on North Africa to the disaster in Japan there is clearly the same dilemma that ancient Greek tragedies faced: Man against Nature. The winner we already know.

So the Arctic will test our ability to work together and our willingness to put environmental protection, sustainability and public safety first.

It will show whether we have understood – or not – that all we have is one planet after all.

The message I bring to you today is that it must be possible to reap the economic benefits opening up in the Arctic while at the same time preserving the environment from further damage. Let us not forget that the people living in the Arctic must benefit from the process too: their way of life, their heritage and their livelihoods are at stake.

Since 2008 we have been formulating a coherent and comprehensive policy to tackle the ever growing challenges of the Arctic region.

Our purpose is threefold.

- Firstly, we want to bring a decisive contribution to preserving the Arctic region, in unison with the people of the Arctic.
- Secondly, we want to make sure that the emerging industrialization and exploitation of Arctic resources follow the highest environmental and safety standards, with fair access and treatment to EU citizens and businesses.
- Thirdly, and following logically from the other two, we want closer and enhanced international cooperation in the Arctic Region.

Our priorities and our approach are very similar to those advocated by the Arctic States, which undeniably have a primary responsibility. The competences of the Arctic Coastal States, as laid down by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, are undisputed.

The Arctic Council which is the main platform to exchange knowledge and best practices on the region's challenges has a fundamental role to play in Arctic cooperation.

We already attend its working groups on a case-by-case basis and we hope to do so on a permanent basis in the future. The EU presence under the status of permanent observer can advantage all the Parties. Let me show how you, by referring to our work, till now.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The EU is a world leader in the fight against climate change and promotes environmental sustainability through reform, research and concrete initiatives.

A successful policy to mitigate climate change will naturally also benefit the Arctic area and its people.

A report published in January and funded by the EU studies the consequences of European activities in nine areas, such as biodiversity, transport, energy and climate change. It shows that our impact is significant: for example, 24 percent of mercury depositions and 42 percent of sulphur dioxide emissions to the Arctic come from the Union!

So, we are aware of our share of responsibility. We intend to work for environmental protection and sustainable development – for example to come to good safety standards for polar vessels or for oil and gas exploitation.

We want concrete projects delivering concrete results.

This is why in the last decade the European Commission has spent 200 million euro on Arctic research projects which focuses on key areas such as sea ice retreating and thinning, rising sea levels and Arctic pollution.

Let me give you a few examples.

Among the projects strengthening international efforts to mitigate climate change or to adapt to the effects of climate change there are:

- The "Arctic Tipping Points project". This is about identifying the tipping points of marine ecosystems and understanding what happens when those lines are crossed.
- The "ice2sea project" seeks to inform the international debate on climate change mitigation and the European debate on coastal adaptation and sea-level defence.
- The Hermione project studies how deep-sea ecosystems work and how they can be used to produce goods and services.
- This year, we will publish a call for a large-scale project to improve our knowledge of the dynamic processes affecting permafrost and of the implications for global warming.

There are also a number of recent EU projects that help indigenous Arctic people protect their lifestyles. For instance, the projects ArcRisk and CLEAR investigate the links between climate change, contaminants, and human health and are supported by the EU with 6 million euros.

We have also started to study the impact of man's activities on Arctic ecosystems; in the coming years we will have to look into the socio-economic consequences of human activities.

The European Commission is also funding observation and research infrastructure in the Arctic. We support long-term measurements and reporting of marine data in the context of the European Marine Observation and Data Network; and we support the establishment of the Arctic component of Global Earth Observation System of Systems.

We have funded feasibility studies for the Aurora Borealis project: an innovative research ice-breaker that could work all year round on Arctic ice. I d like to thank the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research for its strong support to this project.

If realised, this major project will be emblematic of the good cooperation between the Arctic partners.

The most recent building block in this domain emerged from the joint call 'Ocean of Tomorrow' and is worth 11 million euro. It is called ACCESS, which stands for Arctic Climate Change, Economy and Society. It will assess and quantify the impact of climate change on the Arctic's main economic sectors in the next 20 years: maritime transport, fisheries, tourism and resource extraction. The output of this project will underpin the strategic choices that policy makers will have to make in the years to come.

A status of permanent observer for the EU would have several advantages; it would foster international cooperation, which is one of the EU's primary objectives; it would make our work for the region more effective; and it would bring benefits for the Arctic States, because we would bring the EU experience, knowledge and resources into the Council's work.

Most importantly: admitting the EU as permanent observer to the Arctic Council would send a clear signal that the Arctic states welcome investors and researchers from the EU; that our partners, particularly Canada and Russia, know that foreign investments and concerted research efforts are needed to let the region develop sustainably and in the interest of the Arctic people.

It is the only way to appreciate the region's intricate links to the rest of the world and tackle the very acute threats posed to our common heritage in modern times.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As members of a global community sharing a collective responsibility, we must find every opportunity to work together.

This conference is one such opportunity and I wish it every success.

Thank you