



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear Speaker,

The Commission and the High Representative would like to thank the Riksdag for its Opinion concerning the Joint Communication on an integrated European Union policy for the Arctic {JOIN(2016) 21 final}.

We are pleased to note that the Riksdag finds that the Joint Communication strikes a good balance between land and sea and between environment and sustainable development. Establishing a prudent balance between conservation and use of the Arctic is a key challenge for each Arctic State and for inhabitants in the Arctic regions; in this light, it is not surprising that this is also a key challenge for the EU in the context of its Arctic policy.

Further, we note the general support to the approach outlined in the Joint Communication in relation to engagement in international cooperation (with States, local authorities, Arctic forums and processes such as the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Northern Dimension Framework, etc.) as well as the support expressed for our continued engagement with indigenous peoples and local communities. This also touches upon the already mentioned delicate matter of the balance between precaution and use. The socio-economic aspirations of those who live in the Arctic speak for cautious development, while it is clear that some outside observers living in lower latitudes advocate a restrictive approach to the use of Arctic resources.

The Riksdag encourages the EU to pay particular attention to the unique conditions of the Arctic and the importance of cooperation based on international law, solid scientific research, the traditional and local knowledge of the indigenous peoples and local communities. This goes to the core of the spirit of the policy outlined in the Joint Communication and this advice from the Riksdag will certainly guide our work as we move forward.

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In relation to Arctic waters outside national jurisdiction, the Riksdag calls for various steps to help protect and preserve marine biodiversity. In this context, the Commission and the High Representative take this opportunity to draw the attention of the Riksdag to the Joint Communication on international ocean governance: an agenda for the future of our oceans {JOIN(2016) 49 final}, published on 10 November 2016. This Joint Communication proposes initiatives going in the very direction advocated by the Riksdag.

The Riksdag has emphasised the need to minimise the negative impact and risks from increased extraction of natural resources and from maritime transport. This has cross-cutting importance going beyond the Arctic policy itself; it falls under several specific policy areas including environment as well as energy policy and law. In the context of the Arctic policy it is a clear objective to engage in bilateral contacts with Arctic States as well as in regional and multilateral forums to increase support for precautionary and/or preventive measures. The International Polar Code, which is mentioned in the Opinion, is an illustrative example.

The Riksdag has stressed the value of inter-parliamentary cooperation, which has our full support. Similarly, the outreach to civil society and stakeholders is a matter of constant importance. Thus, in the phase of preparing the Arctic Joint Communication the Commission services and the EEAS held consultations with representatives from civil society and other stakeholders to receive suggestions and other input. After the Joint Communication was published, two outreach seminars were held in Brussels (on 1 and 2 June 2016) to which all members and permanent participants of the Arctic Council as well as all members of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council were invited, along with representatives from civil society and other stakeholders. These outreach seminars were held to inform the full Arctic community of the new Joint Communication on the EU's integrated policy for the Arctic.

We intend to continue this outreach work during the coming years thereby ensuring access to scrutinise the EU's Arctic policy. It is our hope that the constructive engagement with stakeholders will allow us to give further finesse to the EU's Arctic policy.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Federica Mogherini
High Representative/Vice-President*