

Thursday 9 October 2008

Arctic Governance

P6_TA(2008)0474

European Parliament resolution of 9 October 2008 on Arctic governance

(2010/C 9 E/07)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the International Polar Year (March 2007 to March 2009),
- having regard to the Eighth Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians, held in Fairbanks, Alaska from 12 to 14 August 2008,
- having regard to the Commission communication on Arctic policy expected in the autumn of 2008,
- having regard to its earlier resolutions on the Northern Dimension of 16 January 2003 ⁽¹⁾, 17 November 2003 ⁽²⁾, 16 November 2005 ⁽³⁾ and 16 November 2006 ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment report from 2005,
- having regard to Rule 108(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the Commission published a Communication on 10 October 2007 entitled ‘An Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union’ (COM(2007)0575) (the ‘Blue Book’),
- B. whereas on 14 March 2008 the High Representative and the Commission issued a policy paper to the European Council, entitled ‘Climate Change and International Security’,
- C. whereas the geopolitical and strategic importance of the Arctic region is growing, as symbolised by the planting of a Russian flag on the sea bed below the North Pole in August 2007,
- D. having regard to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos), which has not yet been ratified by the US Senate and which was not formulated with specific regard to the current circumstances of climate change and the unique consequences of melting ice in the Arctic Seas,
- E. whereas the recent conference of Arctic parliamentarians brought together elected representatives from the European Parliament, Canada, Denmark, Greenland, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Russia and the US, to discuss the issues of maritime safety, health care, environmental protection and sustainable development,
- F. whereas the Arctic region is currently not governed by any specifically formulated multilateral norms and regulations, as it was never expected to become a navigable waterway or an area of commercial exploitation,
- G. whereas maritime traffic in Arctic waters has increased exponentially in recent years, owing to increased interest in offshore drilling and the ever more frequent passage of cruise ships, as well as the prospects offered by the Northwest Passage,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 38 E, 12.2.2004, p. 283.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 87 E, 7.4.2004, p. 411.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 280 E, 18.11.2006, p. 73.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 314 E, 21.12.2006, p. 258.

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- H. whereas the Arctic region may contain approximately 20 % of the world's undiscovered oil and gas reserves,
- I. whereas the Ilulissat Declaration was adopted by the 'A5 countries' (Denmark, Canada, Norway, Russia and the US) in May 2008,
- J. whereas the Commission participated fully in the conference on 'The Arctic: Our Common Concern', organised by the Nordic Council of Ministers in Ilulissat (Greenland) on 9 and 10 September 2008, and whereas Parliament notes the chairman's conclusions in respect of that conference,
- K. whereas the abovementioned conference on the Arctic also focused on climate change in the region, its effects on the indigenous populations and possible adaptations to these effects,
- L. whereas the rate of global warming in the Arctic region is much higher than in the rest of the world, with an increase of 2 °C in the last hundred years compared to an average of 0,6 °C in the rest of the world,
- M. whereas the changes in climatic conditions in the Arctic are already such that the Inuit people, for example, can no longer hunt in the traditional manner, as the ice is too thin to hold their sleds, while wildlife such as polar bears, walruses and foxes are in danger of seeing much of their habitats disappear,
- N. whereas three of the EU's Member States, and a further two of the EU's closely-related neighbours participating in the internal market through the EEA Agreement, are Arctic nations, meaning that the EU and its associated states comprise more than half the numeric membership of the Arctic Council,
1. Is deeply concerned at the effects of climate change on the sustainability of the lives of the indigenous peoples in the region, in terms of both the general environment (melting icecap and permafrost, rising sea levels and flooding) and the natural habitat (the retreating icecap poses problems for polar bears' feeding habits), and underlines that any international decisions relating to these issues must fully involve and take account of all peoples and nations of the Arctic;
 2. Recalls that during the 20th century, Arctic air temperatures increased by approximately 5 °C, and that this increase is ten times faster than the observed global mean surface temperature; underlines that additional warming of about 4-7 °C in the Arctic is predicted for the next hundred years; believes, therefore, that the time for diagnosis is over and the time for action is now;
 3. Underlines that Arctic species and societies have developed highly specialised methods of adaptation to the harsh conditions found at the poles, thus making them extremely vulnerable to dramatic changes in these conditions; is very concerned for walruses, polar bears, seals and other marine mammals which rely on sea-ice for resting, feeding, hunting and breeding, and which are particularly threatened by climate change;
 4. Welcomes the concluding conference statement adopted by the Eighth Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians in Fairbanks on 14 August 2008;
 5. Welcomes the fact that the 'High North' forms part of the EU's Northern Dimension policy, but is convinced that awareness of the Arctic's importance in a global context needs to be raised further by delivering a standalone EU Arctic policy;
 6. Underlines the significance of the Arctic for the global climate in this respect, and hopes that the present support for research activities in that region will be continued beyond the International Polar Year;

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7. Awaits with great interest the forthcoming Commission communication on Arctic policy, and hopes that it will lay the foundations for a meaningful EU Arctic policy; calls on the Commission to address, at least, the following issues in its communication:
- (a) the state of play in relation to climate change, and adaptation to it, in the region;
 - (b) policy options that respect the indigenous populations and their livelihoods;
 - (c) the need to cooperate with our Arctic neighbours on cross-border issues, in particular maritime safety; and
 - (d) options for a future cross-border political or legal structure that could provide for the environmental protection and sustainable orderly development of the region or mediate political disagreement over resources and navigable waterways in the High North;
8. Calls on the Commission to include energy and security policy in the Arctic region on its agenda, and to propose, in particular, in its expected communication on the region, suitable subjects and joint working procedures for the EU and the Arctic countries in the fields of climate change, sustainable development, security of energy supply and maritime safety;
9. Draws attention to the fact that the Arctic region, by virtue of its impact on the world's climate and its singular natural environment, merits special consideration as the EU develops its position for the COP 15 UN Climate Change Conference, due to be held in Copenhagen in 2009;
10. Is of the view that the maritime traffic in the region (both tourist- and offshore drilling-related) does not enjoy anywhere near the level of minimum international safety rules that prevail in other international waters, in terms of either protection of human life or protection of the environment, and urges the Commission to ensure, as soon as possible, that appropriate amendments are made to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) regulations;
11. Emphasises the external aspects of energy policy and the role of the Arctic in the formulation of the Energy Policy for Europe (EPE), as proposed by the March 2007 European Council;
12. Supports the Arctic Council in maintaining the Arctic region as a region of low tension, open to international research cooperation, so as to allow its potential as a future energy supplier region to be fully developed within a sustainable environmental framework;
13. Remains particularly concerned over the ongoing race for natural resources in the Arctic, which may lead to security threats for the EU and overall international instability;
14. Urges the Commission to take a proactive role in the Arctic by at least, as a first step, taking up 'observer status' on the Arctic Council, and considers that the Commission should set up a dedicated Arctic desk;
15. Suggests that the Commission should be prepared to pursue the opening of international negotiations designed to lead to the adoption of an international treaty for the protection of the Arctic, having as its inspiration the Antarctic Treaty, as supplemented by the Madrid Protocol signed in 1991, but respecting the fundamental difference represented by the populated nature of the Arctic and the consequent rights and needs of the peoples and nations of the Arctic region; believes, however, that as a minimum starting-point such a treaty could at least cover the unpopulated and unclaimed area at the centre of the Arctic Ocean;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Governments of the Member States, Norway, Iceland, Russia, Canada and the United States, and the regional cooperation actors.
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