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P7_TA(2014)0236

EU strategy for the Arctic

European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2014 on the EU strategy for the Arctic (2013/2595(RSP))

(2017/C 378/20)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous reports and resolutions on the Arctic, the most recent of which was adopted in January 2011,
- having regard to the joint communication of the Commission and of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 26 June 2012 entitled ‘Developing a European Union policy towards the Arctic region: progress since 2008 and next steps’ (JOIN(2012)0019), and to the Commission communication of 20 November 2008 entitled ‘The European Union and the Arctic region’ (COM(2008)0763),
- having regard to the Preparatory Action ‘Strategic environmental impact assessment of the development of the Arctic’,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 2013 on EU Arctic policy,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea,
- having regard to the Arctic Council programme for 2013 to 2015 under the Canadian chairmanship,
- having regard to the Arctic Council’s Kiruna Declaration of 15 May 2013,
- having regard to the EU-Greenland Partnership 2007-2013 and to the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the EU and Greenland,
- having regard to its position of 5 February 2014 on the draft Council decision on relations between the European Union on the one hand, and Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark on the other ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the EU’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme for the years 2014 to 2020,
- having regard to the Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation, issued in Kirkenes on 3-4 June 2013,
- having regard to the national strategies and policy papers concerning Arctic issues from Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Greenland, Norway, Russia, the USA, Canada and the UK respectively,
- having regard to the statements adopted at the Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum in September 2009 in Brussels and in February 2011 in Tromsø and in Archangelsk in November 2013,
- having regard to the joint statement of the third ministerial meeting of the renewed Northern Dimension, held in Brussels on 18 February 2013,
- having regard to the Barents Euro-Arctic Council priorities for 2013 to 2015 under the Finnish chairmanship,
- having regard to the respective conference statements of the 9th Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, held in Brussels from 13 to 15 September 2010, and of the 10th Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, held in Akureyri from 5 to 7 September 2012, and to the statement made by the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR) on 19 September 2013 in Murmansk on EU observer status in the Arctic Council,

⁽¹⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0075.

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- having regard to the Nordic Council's recommendations of 2012,
 - having regard to Directive 2013/30/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 June 2013 on safety of offshore oil and gas operations ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 20 April 2012 on 'Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020' ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 5 February 2014 on a 2030 framework for climate and energy policies ⁽³⁾,
 - having regard to the EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee Report of 28 October 2013 on Arctic policy,
 - having regard to the judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 3 October 2013 in Case C-583/11P, and of 25 April 2013 in Case T-526/10 concerning the application for annulment of Commission Regulation (EU) No 737/2010 of 10 August 2010 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Regulation (EC) No 1007/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council on trade in seal products ⁽⁴⁾,
 - having regard to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) panel report of 25 November 2013 entitled 'European Communities — measures prohibiting the importation and marketing of seal products', chapter 1.3.5 (setting out the preliminary ruling issued on 29 January 2013), and to the EU's notification of appeal to the WTO Appellate Body of 29 January 2014,
 - having regard to the Nordregio Report 2009:2 ('Strong, Specific and Promising — Towards a Vision for the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas in 2020'),
 - having regard to Rule 110(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the EU has an interest in the Arctic by virtue of its rights and obligations under international law, its commitment to environmental and climate and other policies and its funding, and research activities, as well as economic interests;
- B. whereas the Commission and of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy published their joint communication entitled 'Developing a European Union policy towards the Arctic region: progress since 2008 and next steps' in June 2012;
- C. whereas the Council has not yet published its conclusions on the Commission/EEAS joint communication of summer 2012;
- D. whereas Parliament has been an active participant in the work of the SCPAR through its Delegation for relations with Switzerland, Iceland and Norway and in the Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians;
- E. whereas Denmark, Finland and Sweden are Arctic countries; whereas the EU's only indigenous people, the Sami people, live in the Arctic regions of Finland and Sweden, as well as Norway and Russia;
- F. whereas France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Italy — observers to the Arctic Council — show a substantial involvement in the Arctic and strong interest in future dialogue and cooperation with the Arctic Council;
- G. whereas Iceland and Norway, as engaged and reliable partners, are associated with the EU through the EEA and the Schengen Agreement;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 178, 28.6.2013, p. 66.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 258 E, 7.9.2013, p. 99.

⁽³⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0094.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 216, 17.8.2010, p. 1.

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- H. whereas the Arctic is an inhabited region with sovereign states; whereas the European Arctic region encompasses industrialised modern societies, rural areas and indigenous communities; whereas the active involvement of these regions in the development of the EU-Arctic policy is essential for ensuring legitimacy, mutual understanding and local support for the EU's Arctic engagement;
- I. whereas there has been a longstanding engagement of the EU in the Arctic through its involvement in the Northern Dimension Policy with Russia, Norway and Iceland, in the Barents cooperation and particularly in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council, in the strategic partnerships with Canada, the US and Russia, and in its participation as an active ad hoc observer in the Arctic Council in recent years;
- J. whereas the Arctic Council made a decision in Kiruna on 15 May 2013 to 'affirmatively receive' the EU's application for permanent observer status; whereas this affirmative decision includes the condition of resolving the seal products ban issue between the EU and Canada; whereas the EU and Canada are in the process of resolving this issue; whereas the EU is already working under the above status of permanent observer to the Arctic Council;
- K. whereas the EU and its Member States make a major contribution to research in the Arctic; whereas EU programmes, including the new Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, and the European structural and investment funds support major research projects in the region, benefiting not least the Arctic countries' peoples and economies;
- L. whereas only 20 % of global fossil fuel reserves can be exploited by 2050 in order to keep the average temperature increase below two degrees Celsius;
- M. whereas it is estimated that about one fifth of the world's undiscovered hydrocarbon resources are located in the Arctic region, but more extensive research is needed;
- N. whereas the growing interest in the Arctic region shown by non-Arctic actors, such as China, Japan, India and other countries, their allocation of funding to polar research and the confirmation of South Korea, China, Japan, India and Singapore as observers to the Arctic Council indicate an increasing global geopolitical interest in the Arctic;
- O. whereas research and development, impact assessments and ecosystem protection have to accompany economic investment and development in order to ensure the sustainable development of the Arctic region;
- P. whereas reconciling prospective economic opportunities and interests with socio-cultural, ecological and environmental challenges through sustainable development remains a top priority, reflected also in the national Arctic strategies of the Arctic states;
1. Welcomes the joint communication of the Commission and of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 26 June 2012 as an important building block in ensuring the continuous development of the EU's Arctic policy;
 2. Reiterates its call for a united EU policy on the Arctic, as well as a coherent strategy and a concretised action plan on the EU's engagement on the Arctic, with a focus on socio-economic and environmental issues; believes that this strategic choice is integral in ensuring legitimacy and local support for the EU's Arctic engagement;
 3. Stresses that the increasing use of the Arctic region's natural resources must be conducted in a way which respects and benefits the local population, both indigenous and non-indigenous, and takes full environmental responsibility for the fragile Arctic environment;

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4. Highlights the economic opportunities and the variety of industries in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions, such as tourism, maritime industry and shipping, renewable energy, environmental technology and cleantech, gas and oil, offshore industry, forestry and wood-based industries, mining, transport services and communications, information technology and e-solutions, fishing and aquaculture, and agriculture and traditional livelihoods such as reindeer herding; recognises their impact and importance both in the region and in Europe as a whole, highlighting the engagement of European actors from business, research and development;
5. Takes note of the Kiruna Declaration of the Arctic Council in May 2013, and its decision on the permanent observer status for the EU as well as other state entities; urges the Commission to follow up on the outstanding seal products ban issue with Canada and to duly inform the European Parliament regarding that process; regrets the effects which the EU regulation relating to the ban on seal products has produced for sections of the population, and in particular for indigenous culture and livelihood;
6. Recalls the status of the EU and its Member States as active members in other frameworks of relevance to the Arctic, such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); highlights the need to refocus the EU institutions' activities on those fields of relevance to the political, environmental or economic interests of the EU and its Member States; emphasises, in particular, the need to bear in mind the interests of the EU and the European Arctic states and regions when utilising, amending or developing EU programmes or policies that do or can affect the Arctic, so that they serve the Arctic region as a whole;
7. Regards the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) as an important hub for cooperation between Denmark, Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the Commission; notes the work of the BEAC in the fields of health and social issues, education and research, energy, culture and tourism; notes the advisory role of the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) within the BEAC;
8. Strongly advocates freedom of research in the Arctic and encourages broad cooperation between the states that are active in the field of multidisciplinary Arctic research and in establishing research infrastructures;
9. Recalls the contributions the EU is making to research and development and the engagement of European economic actors in the Arctic region;
10. Stresses that reliable, high-capacity information networks and digital services are instrumental in boosting the economic activity and welfare of people in the Arctic;
11. Calls on the Commission to put forward proposals as to how the Galileo Project or projects such as Global Monitoring for Environment and Security that could have an impact on the Arctic could be developed to enable safer and faster navigation in Arctic waters, thus investing in the safety and accessibility of the North-East Passage in particular, to contribute to better predictability of ice movements, better mapping of the Arctic seabed and an understanding of the main geodynamic processes in the area;
12. Stresses the need for reliable monitoring and observational systems that follow the changing conditions of the Arctic;
13. Emphasises the need for centres of competence for ensuring safety, emergency preparedness and rescue facilities; recommends that the EU actively contribute to the development of such competence centres;
14. Welcomes the identification of Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas in the Arctic region under the CBD as an important process in ensuring the effective conservation of Arctic biodiversity and stresses the importance of implementing an Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) approach in the coastal, marine and terrestrial environments of the Arctic, as highlighted by the Arctic Council EBM expert group;

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15. Reiterates that the serious environmental concerns relating to the Arctic waters require special attention to ensure the environmental protection of the Arctic in relation to any offshore oil and gas operations, taking into account the risk of major accidents and the need for an effective response, as provided for in Directive 2013/30/EU; calls on EU and EEA member states, when assessing the financial capacity of offshore oil and gas operators pursuant to Article 4 of Directive 2013/30/EU, to assess the financial capacity of applicants to cover all liabilities potentially deriving from offshore oil and gas activities in the Arctic, including liability for environmental damage to the extent covered by the Environmental Liability Directive (2004/35/EC);
16. Calls on the Commission, the EEAS and the Member States to encourage and actively promote the highest standards with regard to environmental safety in the Arctic waters;
17. Welcomes the implementation of the Search and Rescue Agreement and the Oil Spill Response Agreement by Arctic Council members; considers it regrettable, however, that the agreement does not include specific binding common standards;
18. Stresses the need for a binding instrument on pollution prevention;
19. Highlights the need for an active engagement of the EU in all relevant working groups of the Arctic Council;
20. Notes the Government of Iceland's initiative to end the EU membership negotiations; requests the Commission and the EEAS to maintain good relations and develop closer cooperation with Iceland in fields of common interest, such as the development of maritime transport, fishing, geothermal energy and the environment, making full use of existing instruments and encouraging Arctic cooperation between EU-based and Icelandic actors and ensuring that European interests do not suffer in this strategically important region;
21. Welcomes the preparations for an Arctic Economic Council, to be attached to the Arctic Council in an advisory function and highlights the proportion of European businesses and institutes contributing to and investing in the Arctic, which suggests an efficient participation of business actors not only from the three Arctic EU Member States but also from other (observer) states, bearing in mind the global nature of many businesses;
22. Stresses the need to undertake investments in an environmentally and socially responsible manner;
23. Welcomes the work on bottom-up initiatives that can ensure a balanced and long-term engagement of European and non-European businesses, and asks the Commission to come forward with suggestions as to how to engage European businesses in sustainable and long-term balanced socio-economic development in the Arctic;
24. Emphasises that the EU must take into account the need for raw material activities to provide local benefits and enjoy local acceptance; acknowledges the current gap between relevant competence on mineral extraction, processing and projected future needs as the region develops further; suggests that by participating in joint projects at the European level, such as the Innovation Partnership on Raw Materials, Arctic actors can exchange information and competence across topics;
25. Asks the Commission, in view of the huge number of scientific, economic and civic activities, in particular in the European Arctic, the Barents region and beyond, to develop practices aimed at better utilising existing EU funding and ensuring a proper balance in protecting and developing the Arctic region when channelling EU funds towards the Arctic;
26. Stresses the vital importance of the EU regional and cohesion policy with regard to interregional and cross-border cooperation;

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27. Further calls for the development of more effective synergies between existing programmes, for instance under the Interreg IV programme, the Northern Periphery Programme (NPP), Kolarctic, Baltic and the Blue Growth strategy, as well as contributions to fund Northern Dimension Partnerships such as the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) and the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transportation and Logistics (NDPTL), or other European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) envelopes to enable the efficient channelling of funding, and to clearly define investment priorities for engagement with the Arctic region; urges the Commission and the EEAS to cooperate for a coherent channelling of funds on the Arctic and thereby to maximise effective interaction between the EU's internal and external programmes and projects related to Arctic and sub-Arctic regions;
28. Emphasises that an EU-Arctic Strategy requires the appropriate budget support to be made operational;
29. Is of the opinion that the Northern Dimension policy based on regional cooperation and pragmatic partnerships serves as a successful model of stability, joint ownership and engagement involving the EU, Iceland, Norway and Russia;
30. Underlines, in this respect, the significance of Arctic priorities such as well-functioning infrastructure and logistics, development in the Arctic region, encouraging investment in cold-climate expertise and relevant environment-friendly technologies, and support for regional and rural entrepreneurship and particularly for SMEs; calls for the EU to invest greater effort in integrating such Arctic priorities into its Europe 2020 strategy for growth and into programmes such as Horizon 2020 and Innovation Union, as well as into other Union research programmes;
31. Reaffirms its support for, and urges the Commission to proceed with, the establishment of the EU Arctic Information Centre as a networked undertaking with a permanent office in Rovaniemi, with reference to the Preparatory Action 'Strategic environmental impact assessment of the development of the Arctic', as supported by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in their 2012 joint communication and implemented by the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland together with a network of European centres of excellence on the Arctic, with the goal of ensuring efficient access to Arctic information, dialogues at all levels and communication for the purpose of harnessing information and knowledge with a view to sustainability in the Arctic;
32. Awaits, in this regard, the results of the 18-months Preparatory Action (PA) project on the strategic environmental impact assessment of the development of the Arctic, to be published this spring; calls for the EU to proceed swiftly thereafter with the establishment of the EU Arctic Information Centre;
33. Highlights the need to maintain a special interface on the Arctic with the goal of providing an open, cross-party and cross-issues platform in Brussels, fostering understanding among the wide range of relevant actors in both the Arctic and the EU connecting the spheres of policymaking, science, civil society and business;
34. Recommends strengthening regular exchange and consultations on Arctic-related topics with regional, local and indigenous stakeholders of the European Arctic in order to facilitate mutual understanding, in particular during the EU-Arctic policymaking process; stresses the need for such consultations to draw on the experience and expertise of the region and its inhabitants and to guarantee the essential legitimacy of the EU's further engagement as an Arctic actor;
35. Suggests that there should be enhanced coordination within the EU institutions between the Commission and the EEAS, particularly considering the cross-sectoral nature of Arctic issues;
36. Recognises that the waters around the North Pole are mostly international waters;
37. Draws attention to the fact that energy security is closely related to climate change; considers that energy security must be improved by reducing the EU's dependence on fossil fuels; highlights the fact that the transformation of the Arctic represents one major effect of climate change on EU security; stresses the need to address this risk multiplier through a reinforced EU strategy for the Arctic, and through an enhanced policy of EU-generated renewable energies and energy efficiency that significantly reduces the Union's reliance on external sources and thereby improves its security position;

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38. Supports the initiative by five Arctic coastal states to agree on interim precautionary measures to prevent any future fisheries in the Arctic high seas without the prior establishment of appropriate regulatory mechanisms, and supports the development of a network of Arctic conservation areas and, in particular, the protection of the international sea area around the North Pole outside the economic zones of the coastal states;
39. Calls on the Member States and the EEA states to support the international commitment under the CBD to protect 10 % of each coastal and marine region;
40. Calls for the EU to make all possible efforts to ensure a sustainable reconciliation between economic activities and viable socio-ecological and environmental protection and development, in order to safeguard wellbeing within the Arctic;
41. Stresses that maintaining developed and sustainable communities in the Arctic with a high quality of life is of the utmost importance, and that the EU can play a vital role in the matter; calls for the EU, in this respect, to intensify its work in the areas of eco-system-based management, multilateral cooperation, knowledge-based decision-making and close cooperation with local inhabitants and indigenous peoples;
42. Acknowledges the wish of the inhabitants and governments of the Arctic region with sovereign rights and responsibilities to continue to pursue sustainable economic development while at the same time protecting the traditional sources of the indigenous peoples' livelihood and the very sensitive nature of the Arctic ecosystems;
43. Acknowledges the fundamental importance of the Regional Aid Guidelines (RAG), which enable regions in the High North with special characteristics and challenges to continue to use appropriate mechanisms to foster innovation and sustainable growth;
44. Confirms its formulations on the rights of indigenous people in general and the Sami in particular, as the EU's only indigenous people;
45. Supports the meetings held by the Commission with the six associations of circumpolar indigenous peoples that are recognised as permanent participants in the Arctic Council; asks the Commission to explore the possibility of ensuring that their voices are taken into account in EU debates, providing funds for these associations;
46. Acknowledges that EU policies that strengthen higher education and research facilities in the area are fundamental for strengthening innovative environments and technology transfer mechanisms; underlines the importance of supporting the development of cooperation networks between higher education institutions within and beyond the region and providing opportunities for research funding, particularly in fields where the region has a proven track record, in order to bring about sustainable economic development in the regions of the Arctic;
47. Underlines the major importance of the safety and security of new world trade routes by sea in the Arctic, in particular for the EU and its Member States' economies, these countries, which control 40 % of world commercial shipping;
48. Welcomes the work in the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) on finalising the mandatory Polar Code for shipping; encourages cooperation in both research and investment with a view to developing a robust and safe infrastructure for the Arctic sea routes, and stresses that the EU and its Member States should actively uphold the principles of freedom of navigation and innocent passage;
49. Emphasises that the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) must have the necessary means to monitor and prevent pollution from maritime shipping as well as from oil and gas installations in the Arctic area;
50. Calls on the states in the region to ensure that any current transport routes — and those that may emerge in the future — are open to international shipping and to refrain from introducing any arbitrary unilateral obstacles, be they financial or administrative, that could hinder shipping in the Arctic, other than internationally agreed measures aimed at increasing security or protection of the environment;

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51. Notes the importance of developing infrastructure links connecting the Arctic region with the rest of Europe;
 52. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to focus on transport corridors such as roads, railways and maritime shipping with a view to maintaining and promoting cross-border links in the European Arctic and bringing goods from the Arctic to European markets; is of the opinion that as the EU develops its transport infrastructure (Connecting Europe Facility, TEN-T) further, the links to and within the European Arctic needs to be improved;
 53. Reiterates the right of the people of the Arctic to determine their own livelihoods and recognises their wish for sustainable development of the region; asks the Commission to report on which EU programmes could be used to support such long-term balanced sustainable development, and prepare measures with a view to making a more concrete contribution to fulfilling this desire;
 54. Takes note of recent exploration activities in the European Arctic and the Barents Sea, and highlights the bilateral cooperation between Norway and Russia, aiming for application of the highest available technical standards in the field of environmental protection, while prospecting for oil and gas in the Barents Sea; points out in particular the importance of the continuous development of new technologies, specially developed for the Arctic environment, such as sub-seabed installation technology;
 55. Recalls the position of the EU as a main consumer of Arctic natural gas, and highlights the role of natural gas from a safe and secure supply and produced according to the highest possible standards, and as an important bridge element for the shift to a low-carbon economy in the future; supports the step-by-step precautionary approach in the development of energy resources in the Arctic, recognising that the regions of the Arctic differ substantially;
 56. Stresses the EU's strong relations with Greenland and the geostrategic importance of that territory; takes note of the priorities of the Government of Greenland, with a renewed emphasis on economic development and the exploitation of raw materials; asks the Commission and the EEAS to explore how the EU and EU-based actors from science, technology and business can contribute to and assist in the sustainable development of Greenland so that both environmental concerns and the need for economic development are taken into account; expresses, in this connection, its concern regarding the limited results of the Letter of Intent signed by a Commission Vice-President with Greenland;
 57. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the governments and parliaments of the Arctic region states.
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