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Norway's recent decision to advance seabed mining in the Arctic

European Parliament resolution of 7 February 2024 on Norway's recent decision to advance seabed mining in the Arctic (2024/2520(RSP))

(C/2024/6333)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Norwegian Parliament's decision of 9 January 2024 on mining activities on the Norwegian continental shelf – opening of area and strategy for managing the resources,
- having regard to the Norwegian Ministry of Energy's strategic environmental impact assessment of seabed minerals on the Norwegian continental shelf of 27 October 2022,
- having regard to the Norwegian Government's report of 20 June 2023 on mineral activities on the Norwegian continental shelf – opening of areas and strategy for administering the resources,
- having regard to the Norwegian Environment Agency's statement of 27 January 2023 on the hearing and impact assessment for mineral activities on the Norwegian continental shelf,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 entitled 'The European Green Deal' (COM(2019)0640),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives' (COM(2020)0380), to Parliament's resolution of 9 June 2021 thereon ⁽¹⁾, and to the Council conclusions of 23 October 2020 thereon,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 17 May 2021 on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU – Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future (COM(2021)0240),
- having regard to its resolution of 3 May 2022 entitled 'Toward a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors' ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 7 October 2021 on the Arctic: opportunities, concerns and security challenges ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 January 2018 on international ocean governance: an agenda for the future of our oceans in the context of the 2030 SDGs ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 October 2022 on momentum for the ocean: strengthening ocean governance and biodiversity ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to the joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 24 June 2022 entitled 'Setting the course for a sustainable blue planet – Joint Communication on the EU's International Ocean Governance agenda' (JOIN(2022)0028),
- having regard to the joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 10 November 2016 entitled 'International ocean governance: an agenda for the future of our oceans' (JOIN(2016)0049),
- having regard to the Commission's Note Verbale No 21/13 of October 2023 sent to the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 67, 8.2.2022, p. 25.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 465, 6.12.2022, p. 2.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 132, 24.3.2022, p. 113.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 458, 19.12.2018, p. 9.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 132, 14.4.2023, p. 106.

- having regard to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which entered into force on 29 December 1993, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and to Decision 15/24 of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity,
 - having regard to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), notably Article 145 thereof on protection of the marine environment,
 - having regard to the Agreement under UNCLOS on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement),
 - having regard to the mandate under the of the International Seabed Authority established under UNCLOS and to the 1994 Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of UNCLOS,
 - having regard to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR Convention), which covers Arctic waters,
 - having regard to the 1920 Svalbard Treaty, signed on 9 February 1920 in Paris,
 - having regard to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context ⁽⁶⁾, signed in Espoo on 25 February 1991 (Espoo Convention), and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment ⁽⁷⁾ (the SEA Protocol),
 - having regard to the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, of which Norway is a founding member,
 - having regard to International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Resolution 122 entitled 'Protection of deep-ocean ecosystems and biodiversity through a moratorium on seabed mining',
 - having regard to the UN General Assembly resolution entitled 'Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York on 25 September 2015, and in particular to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which encourages the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources,
 - having regard to the global assessment report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of May 2019 on biodiversity and ecosystem services,
 - having regard to the Agreement adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015, and which entered into force on 4 November 2016, including subsequent COP decisions,
 - having regard to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change special report of 24 September 2019 on the ocean and cryosphere in a changing climate,
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas on 9 January 2024, the Storting, the Norwegian Parliament, approved a decision to allow for an area of 281 200 square kilometres in the Arctic to be explored for potential seabed mining; whereas the process is open-ended and further decisions on extraction plans or mining permits depend on further democratic decisions by the Norwegian Government, in line with the Norwegian Seabed Minerals Act; whereas the first extraction plans must be approved by the Storting, according to the decision;
- B. whereas the Norwegian Environment Agency considers that the environmental impact assessment contains significant knowledge gaps on nature, technology and the potential environmental effects and that it therefore does not provide a sufficient basis for mineral extraction;
- C. whereas Norway and the EU enjoy a deep and long-standing relationship as neighbours and partners, share common political objectives and fundamental values and are part of the single market through the European Economic Area;

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 104, 24.4.1992, p. 7.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 308, 19.11.2008, p. 35.

- D. whereas much of the proposed exploratory area is located on the Norwegian extended continental shelf and much of the area above the extended continental shelf is considered as high seas and areas for international fisheries; whereas this continental shelf is subject to the provisions of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty; whereas the area falls under Svalbard's Fisheries Protection Zone, allowing state parties, including 22 EU Member States and 23 other states, an equal opportunity to establish fisheries;
- E. whereas the EU sent a note verbale to Norway in October 2023 expressing its concern about the significant negative effects from the announced deep-sea mining on fish stocks, fisheries and access to fishing grounds, including on the continental shelf of the Svalbard archipelago;
- F. whereas Norway is a signatory to the Espoo Convention and the SEA Protocol, which means that Norway has a legal obligation to avoid significant transboundary impacts; whereas Norway also has a legal obligation to protect the marine environment under the OSPAR Convention;
- G. whereas the ecosystems of the Arctic have been identified as being of central environmental importance for biodiversity, fish stocks and climate regulation; whereas these particularly vulnerable ecosystems are already facing pressure from climate change, resulting in more acidic and warmer oceans, which will likely affect the migration patterns of important fish stocks; whereas mineral extraction on the Arctic seabed risks releasing methane stored in sub-glacial ecosystems and Arctic permafrost soils; whereas the Arctic ecosystems are highly susceptible to pollution and other human impacts; whereas necessary repair or clean-up processes are very difficult to conduct owing to the harsh natural conditions and the long distances to ports;
- H. whereas the deep sea is the oldest biome on the planet and is the area of the planet least known to humankind; whereas the deep sea is believed to have the highest biodiversity on Earth, provides critical environmental services, including long-term carbon sequestration, and is vulnerable to human disturbances; whereas the ocean absorbs around 90 % of excess heat and 25 % of global CO₂ emissions; whereas serious concerns have been raised about the impacts of deep-sea mining on the loss of biodiversity and on the functioning of the ecosystem, the effects of which will be locked in for many generations to come; whereas the ocean should be recognised at international level as a global common good and should be protected in the light of its uniqueness and interconnectedness and the essential ecosystem services that it provides; whereas current and future generations depend on these services for their survival and well-being;
- I. whereas the BBNJ Agreement was concluded in June 2023; whereas the EU and Norway were among the first signatories to the treaty; whereas the BBNJ Agreement was a priority for the EU, which led negotiations at global level through the BBNJ High Ambition Coalition, a coalition launched at the One Ocean Summit in Brest in February 2022 that Norway also joined; whereas the BBNJ Agreement requires assessments to be carried out on the impact of economic activities on biodiversity on the high seas;
- J. whereas the current state of scientific knowledge does not allow for an accurate assessment of the environmental impact of seabed mining, and an international research effort is still required to reach a scientific consensus on this subject; whereas the Commission has stressed the need for long-term research in order to truly assess the impacts of deep-sea mining; whereas premature exploration and mining could cause permanent and irreversible damage to ecosystems; whereas more scientific research is needed to fully understand the potential effects of deep-sea mining on the marine environment and biodiversity;
- K. whereas opening up this area to deep-seabed mining could be detrimental to fish stocks and fisheries, and could impact the access of EU Member States' vessels to the fishing grounds in the area; whereas international fishing interests, including EU fisheries, were not considered in the impact assessment for this decision; whereas in November 2021, the European Long Distance Fisheries, Pelagic and North Western Waters Advisory Councils called for a moratorium on deep-sea mining, following similar recommendations in 2020 and 2019; whereas the Norwegian Fishermen's Association has also been highly critical of the decision;
- L. whereas internationally, a growing number of states, including seven EU Member States (Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden), have expressed support for a moratorium, a precautionary pause or a total ban on deep-seabed mining; whereas in September 2021, the IUCN World Conservation Congress overwhelmingly adopted a motion calling for a moratorium on deep-sea mining, including by the International Seabed Authority, with support from Austria, Germany, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden, among others;

- M. whereas 37 financial institutions representing EUR 3,3 trillion of combined assets raised concerns over seabed mining activities to the member states of the International Seabed Authority; whereas international companies such as Volvo, BMW, Google, Samsung, Phillips, Northvolt and Volkswagen have expressed their support for a moratorium on deep-seabed mining and have committed to not sourcing or financing minerals from the deep seabed; whereas Equinor, Norway's largest company, has emphasised the need to gain more knowledge on deep-sea mining off Norway's coast and has concluded that it is not yet viable owing to the environmental risk; whereas the UN Environment Programme's Finance Initiative has warned the finance community that, in their current form, there is no foreseeable way that the financing of deep-seabed mining activities can be consistent with the Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles;
- N. whereas a large part of the demand for raw materials can and should be met through the use of recycling and circular economy measures, the development of substitute materials and demand reduction policies;
1. Expresses its concerns about the Storting's decision of 9 January 2024 to open areas for deep-seabed activities;
 2. Notes that the Storting's decision includes a process for continued mapping, knowledge acquisition and assessments of the environmental impact of potential mining activities, and does not automatically grant approval for extraction activities, as the first extraction plans must be approved by the Storting, according to the decision;
 3. Reiterates its calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote an international moratorium on deep-seabed mining, including at the International Seabed Authority, until the effects of deep-sea mining on the marine environment, biodiversity and human activities at sea have been studied and researched sufficiently and deep-seabed mining can be managed to ensure no marine biodiversity loss or degradation of marine ecosystems; calls on all countries to apply the precautionary principle and support an international moratorium on deep-seabed mining;
 4. Recalls Norway's obligations as a party to several treaties, notably the Svalbard Treaty, to various agreements relating to the management of the fishing stocks in that area, the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, including Arctic waters, against the adverse effects of human activities and the Espoo Convention; stresses that the BBNJ Agreement has been signed both by the EU and Norway, and calls on all other parties to UNCLOS, including Norway, to sign and ratify it without delay;
 5. Calls on Norway to continue to engage with the EU in the spirit of mutual partnership and the Green Alliance signed in April 2023 in order to address all concerns and ensure the protection of the marine environment and the Arctic ecosystems; calls on the Commission and Norway to engage in a continuous dialogue and to exchange scientific research and knowledge on the seabed and the sustainable management of the ocean; underlines that Norway and the EU, through their respective strategies, follow a similar approach regarding a balanced raw materials policy based on mitigation of demand, reuse, efficiency, recycling, usage of waste streams and substitution;
 6. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Storting and the Government of Norway.