

**Keynote speech delivered at the 15th Arctic Futures Symposium by
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Dear Arctic friends,

Let me start by thanking the International Polar Foundation for organising Arctic Futures Symposium in Brussels. We in the European Commission highly appreciate your efforts to bring the Arctic to Brussels.

It is a great pleasure addressing you once again. Since I last stood here, a year ago, a few things have changed, also in the EU.

For starters, **a new Commission is in place**, with a new Commissioner for Ocean and Fisheries.

Commissioner Costas Kadis is the **Ocean Commissioner, and that includes the Arctic Ocean**. This is a major development for the EU Arctic policy, and for our work in, on and with the Arctic. Commissioner Kadis and I are highly committed to a **peaceful and prosperous Arctic**, and we are already working together to ensure the EU keeps delivering.

Our maps show not only Mercator but also Polar projections. Our work also sees the Arctic from an Arctic perspective, and we keep the Arctic in our upcoming activities.

The European Union has been busy **delivering** under its EU Arctic policy.

One of our most celebrated developments this year was the inauguration of the **European Commission Office in Nuuk, Greenland**, by President von der Leyen. In her words, this Office is "*a new era of the EU-Greenland partnership*". Her assessment is right on spot. The creation of this Office was one of the most commented proposals under the 2021 EU Arctic policy update; it is a sign of the EU's **work with and commitment towards Greenland**.

My colleague Stefano has spoken about the strategic importance Greenland has for the EU. This is true for critical raw materials as well as for **fisheries**. As an example, in 2024 we reached a landmark renewal of our **fisheries protocol with Greenland**, a testament to our **shared commitment to sustainable resource management and regional cooperation**.

By supporting Greenland's economic resilience through **fair and balanced terms**, this protocol underscores the EU's dedication to fostering **long-term sustainable growth and environmental responsibility** in Greenland and the wider Arctic. And this joins the **225 million euros** the EU provides for the period 2021-2027 to support **education and green growth** activities in Greenland.

We are working with people living in the Arctic, and we are doing so at the most local level possible. In January 2024, we launched the **Arctic Urban Regional Cooperation** network. With a fund of around 2 million euros, this unique network brings together 15 municipalities from across the Arctic, focusing on matters chosen by them. From **attractiveness to depopulation** to tackling the **impacts of climate change**, this **peer-based** network is setting **a new standard for cooperation and**

collaboration across the Arctic. Let me express a special thanks to the **Arctic Mayors' Forum** and their support, which has contributed to the success of this initiative.

We are also cementing our work to support **Arctic young people**. While young perspectives have been prominent in EU-Arctic activities for years, in 2024 we launched a 2.3-million-euro **project** aimed to **foster and enhance Arctic young voices**, and to **build bridges between the Arctic and European youth**. As a testament to this commitment, in 2024 a full **EU-Arctic Youth Dialogue** took place in Brussels next to the EU Arctic Forum, and it will also feature in its next edition. The youth dialogue will be a **major component** under the new Commission, and the EU-Arctic Youth Dialogue is **spearheading** this work.

Also in 2024, we started our third grant to the **Sámi Council**, for a 3-year project with 300,000 euros funding. We keep helping the Saami Council enhance their capacities and bring south **visions and lessons from Sápmi** and the Sámi people.

These developments join the other achievements, for example the launching of the **Copernicus Arctic Hub** in 2024; the ongoing investment of around **380 million euros** dedicated to **research and innovation** under **Horizon**; or the investment of **273 million euros** in the 2021-2027 period focused on **sustainable development, climate change, innovation, SMEs, culture, education or cross-border governance** under **Interreg programmes**.

We are working with likeminded **Arctic states**, and with the **Arctic Council**. For instance, we are exploring how the **EU's work indirectly benefits** the work of the Arctic Council's working groups, while directly supporting their work notably through the Commission's Joint Research Centre. We in particular support the **Wildfires Initiative** under the Norwegian Chairship, as we see with increasing concern how wildfires affect the region. When the Arctic goes ablaze, we all suffocate.

We also see an increasing need to **connect some dots**, a way for the EU to contribute making the Arctic **an attractive and better place to work and live in**. Through current and future initiatives, we want to help increase the attractiveness of Arctic communities and foster sustainable economic development, and doing so in a way that works for those living in the Arctic today, especially Indigenous Peoples, as well as future generations.

Many of you might be wondering if with a new Commission an update of the EU Arctic policy is coming. Our last update took place to reflect changes and needs, and the next update, whenever it takes place, will also cover new developments. Yet, until that moment comes, we keep working to deliver our goals under our current policy.

We continue working **with** and **for** the Arctic, delivering under **Horizon** or **Interreg**, engaging with **local inhabitants, Indigenous Peoples, young people, or business stakeholders**. We contribute to making the Arctic **safe, stable and prosperous**, in a manner that promotes **sustainable development** to the benefit of **local inhabitants** and **future generations**, and that is also **respectful** and **mindful** of the **unique Arctic ecosystems**.

As we stated in 2021, **climate change is the main threat to the Arctic**, and let me add, to the rest of the world. That reality holds true today. And our work to **tackle climate change and its impacts**, in the Arctic and elsewhere, remains **targeted** and **strong**.

Let me finish by reminding you that the **2025** edition of the **EU Arctic Forum, Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue and EU-Arctic Youth Dialogue**, the EU's flagship events on Arctic matters, will take place in **Kittilä, Finland**, in June.

I hope you can join us there!