

Delegates, colleagues,

It is my great pleasure addressing you today and seeing many **Arctic friends** here in Brussels.

Much has **changed** in the Arctic and the world since the previous Arctic Futures Symposium in November 2021.

I echo the EU's External Action Service in condemning Russia's **illegal and unjustified** war against Ukraine, which as noted by my colleague Angelina Eichhorst, has also **impacted cooperation and dialogue** in the Arctic.

Yet, geopolitical developments are not the only threat, or even the most important threat, the Arctic faces.

The EU stated in its 2021 Arctic policy update, and reiterates today, that the **main threat to Arctic** as well as the planet is and remains **climate change** and its impacts.

With warming rates **several times over** the global average, climate change is **already changing** the Arctic.

Climate change is impacting **infrastructure** sitting on permafrost, affecting **migration patterns** of species, reducing the **thickness** and formation **time** of sea ice, increasing the **risk of natural hazards** such as floods or wildfires, or contributing to **rising sea levels** from the melting of the Greenland ice sheet.

These are just some, worrisome examples of how climate change is already having a **measurable negative impact** in the Arctic and on Arctic communities.

In addition, climate change is unfortunately exacerbated by and linked to **biodiversity loss** and **pollution**, in a very negative feedback loop.

And as we all know, the Arctic, as an ecosystem in delicate balance, is **particularly vulnerable** to these phenomena.

The Arctic also faces **human, societal, and economic** challenges, and those must not be overlooked.

Sustainable economic development and availability of attractive jobs are essential for **competitiveness** in the Arctic, to attract and retain **talent and people** who do not only live and work but also **thrive and enjoy** living in the region.

Access to **services** and coverage of basic **needs** must be ensured both in urban and rural areas, reducing for instance health **inequalities** or increasing **connectivity** access, which enables an array of **digital services**, including health, education and administration services.

We must address inequalities driven by **depopulation** and **unbalanced economic growth**, where some parts of the Arctic grow, but at the expense of other areas.

Traditional **livelihoods, cultures and languages** must also be protected. We must listen to the voices of those who live in the Arctic, in particular **indigenous peoples**. And we must pay special attention to the voice of the **youth**, as they are going to inherit the world we make today.

Some of these challenges are also **exacerbated by climate change**, such as the health, economic and social risks posed by thawing permafrost, or the increasing risk to food production, for instance to fisheries or aquaculture, but also to reindeer husbandry or salmon runs.

We must also have present that the Arctic is not a monolithic region, and that in fact **there are many Arctics**: geographically, demographically, economically or socially. Even though we speak of Arctic matters, **specific analyses** must be carried out, and **tailored approaches** must be developed.

These are some of the challenges the EU has identified in its Arctic policy. And when addressing these challenges, the EU takes a **comprehensive approach, putting people first**.

The EU is **seeking solutions** to these challenges at different levels: within the Arctic and the EU as well as bilaterally and globally.

And the **EU Arctic policy** brings our actions together, in a *whole-of-government* approach, maximizing synergies and building on our strengths.

In fact, many of the EU's programmes and initiatives have a direct or indirect positive effect in the Arctic, under the umbrella of the **European Green Deal**.

We continue advancing the **green and digital transitions**, promoting **environmental protection**, fostering **prosperity**, supporting **indigenous peoples**, promoting **people-to-people contacts**, working together on **energy, critical materials, civil protection or health**, and at the same time, further strengthening and promoting our **common values**.

We are working towards **reducing vulnerabilities and inequalities**, **mitigating** against and **adapting** for changes caused by climate change and other challenges, and overall, **improving societal resilience**.

We are increasing our **presence** in the Arctic, for instance through a new Commission office in Nuuk, which will open in early 2023; but also deepening **communication** and **exchange** with Arctic representatives, including regions and municipalities as well as Indigenous Peoples.

We regularly exchange with Arctic stakeholders, talking to those living in the region; and we continue holding our **EU Arctic Forum** and **Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue**, which in 2023 goes back to the Arctic, and will take place in Nuuk, Greenland, on 8-9 February.

We are empowering young Arctic voices, providing the means to build capacity and to participate in high-level fora where their messages can be heard loud and clear, **as part of the dialogue** and not from the distance.

The EU brings about positive change in and for the Arctic, for instance implementing the **European Green Deal**, supporting research and

innovation through **Horizon Europe**, fostering **regional development and cohesion** in the European Arctic, tackling **risks and emergencies** through the **Copernicus Programme** or the EU's **Civil Protection Mechanism**, or providing a sphere of **freedom, respect, predictability, rule of law and prosperity**.

And we are doing this together with Arctic states, stakeholders, and partners.

The EU will work to promote **inclusive and fair sustainable development**, to address the **multiple challenges** the region faces, and to keep the Arctic **safe, stable and prosperous**.

The EU is and remains a strong and active actor in the Arctic. We are a **reliable partner** with a shared vision based on **equality and prosperity**.

We remain **committed** to this unique, vibrant and astonishing part of the world.

Because **the EU is in the Arctic**, and **the Arctic is in the EU**.

Many thanks for your attention.