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Arctic Futures Symposium

Brussels, 28 November 2023, 13:05-13:45

Speech

Distinguished delegates, Arctic friends, dear colleagues,

Major transformation drivers are changing the Arctic: climate change, geoeconomics, geopolitics, or security.

In October 2021, we updated our Arctic policy to account for a new global context, one where the impacts of climate change are not a prediction for the future, but a present reality.

Despite geopolitical tensions elsewhere, increasing regional rivalries, or even possible economic competition, we maintain that climate change is the most acute threat the Arctic and the world face.

The EU also has a clear vision for the Arctic.

We want to contribute for this region to remain an area of dialogue, cooperation, peace and stability.

We want to help address the daunting multifaceted (ecological, social, political and economic) challenges the Arctic, people living in the Arctic, and Arctic ecosystems, face.

And we want to foster prosperity, wellbeing, diversity and inclusivity in the Arctic, supporting inclusive sustainable development to the benefit of those living there.

This vision is not only the result of three EU Member States being Arctic States, or because hundreds of thousands of EU citizens live in the Arctic.

We believe as well that a safe, stable and prosperous Arctic is beneficial as well as necessary for our planet.

We want to boost a forward-looking Arctic that can face present and future challenges.

Let me start with our commitment to **people living in the Arctic**, mentioning a few Arctic-specific actions.

We have been supporting the Saami Council to enhance its capacities, so that it can better represent Sápmi in any process they identify as relevant. With our support, the Saami Council has developed a Sápmi-EU strategy, has evaluated the impact of the European Green Deal in Sápmi, and has established a youth lab to birth new ideas. We keep supporting the Saami Council, as we are committed to Arctic Indigenous Peoples.

We also support Greenland's education and green growth sectors with 202.5 million euros and 22.5 million euros, respectively.

In a few weeks, the EU-funded Arctic Urban and Regional Cooperation network will be launched. This is a network of 15 Arctic cities, meant to share experiences, lessons and best practices, to foster exchanges, and to support collective identification of challenges and possible solutions.

This network will address pressing issues, such as climate change resilience and adaptation, sustainable economic development, shifting demographics, social needs, diversity or inclusivity. And it will do so at the local level.

This is a first-of-a-kind network in the Arctic.

We are committed to furthering our regional development support, allocating around 260 million euros over the period 2021 to 2027, assigned to interregional sustainable development projects under the Interreg programmes.

The EU is committed to fostering dialogue with and on the **Arctic**. We regularly hold two back-to-back events, the EU Arctic Forum and Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue. Alternating between the Arctic and the EU, these events took place in Greenland in 2023, and will take place in Brussels on 14-15 May 2024.

We also launched a call for grants for 2.3 million euros to establish the EU Arctic Youth Dialogues, a youth-led initiative to support capacity building amongst Arctic young people, to enable their participation in Arctic and

global conversations, and to foster exchanges and understanding between the Arctic and EU youths.

The EU Arctic Youth Dialogues will start delivering in early 2024, and will become part of the EU Arctic Forum and Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue.

The EU's commitment to **Arctic cooperation**, and how much the EU values the Arctic Council's work and unique role.

The EU is a strong, solid, and reliable partner in Arctic cooperation, including the Arctic Council.

The EU is also committed to **Arctic research**.

As you know, the EU is a global leader in polar funding, with some 380 million euros under Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe dedicated to Arctic research, including coordination and multiplication initiatives such as the EUPolarNet.

And let me give few examples of our commitment to **protect the Arctic environment** and to promote **sustainability** and **science-driven policymaking**.

One of our goals in the EU Arctic policy is to make the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement a success.

This is a unique agreement, characterized by a precautionary, science-driven, and inclusive approach that takes into account traditional knowledge from the beginning, by design.

The EU is part of this Agreement, and has been key in developing the Joint Programme of Scientific Research and Monitoring, and funding projects that directly and indirectly contribute to gain more knowledge about and understanding of the Central Arctic Ocean. We are working with other Parties to the Agreement to meet the deadlines we have coming up, in particular regarding its scientific component.

Another important example is the Agreement on marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, or BBNJ, which in governance terms applies to the Central Arctic Ocean. This Agreement is a win for the Ocean, a key milestone for the protection of our oceans and a victory for multilateralism.

It is also an important step for the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, in particular the target to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030. The EU and its Member States signed the Agreement in September 2023, and we are working towards its ratification.

And I will finish with the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (the OSPAR Convention), where the EU is a party, and where we have been supporting the establishment of Marine Protected Areas, also within the Arctic Ocean, and always within the limits and mandate of the OSPAR Convention.

The **ongoing transformation in the Arctic** will be intense.

But the Arctic needs not to be driven by those forces; it can take advantage of them and shape a brighter future.

The EU will keep supporting Arctic players and stakeholders, so that this transformation is positive, benefits those living in the Arctic, and helps preserve the unique ecosystems, idiosyncrasies, cultures and worldviews of this wonderful and dynamic region of our planet.

This is not altruism; this is not charity; this is an imperative and a necessity.

Because a sustainable, inclusive and thriving Arctic means a sustainable, inclusive and thriving planet.

I thank you for your attention.