

Forum for 21st century

The Development in the Arctic

Propositions to 1st Draft

The EU would like to thank the Forum for the 21st Century for initiating the discussion and organizing the conference on the development in the Arctic. The EU recognizes the seriousness of the geopolitical, environmental and economic situation in the Arctic.

We would like to express our full support towards finding possible solution to this situation. We hope we would reach a common understanding between all states present and all parties involved.

1. Political division

The EU recognizes the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the appropriate vehicle to set the criteria for dividing the Arctic area in just and equitable manner. Thus, we believe the aquatory should be in the property of the Arctic states and not a public property.

2. Security dimension

Concerning the security dimension, the EU reminds the Forum for the 21st Century that in accordance with the international law and the UNCLOS, any military action, as a military occupation, is not permitted in the Arctic area. According to the Danish Arctic Strategy, the enforcing of the states' sovereignty is one of the priorities and therefore, the UN armed forces, through their visible presence in the region, are permittied

The Antarctic Treaty forbids military activity in Antarctica, such as "the establishment of military bases and fortifications, the carrying out of military manoeuvres, as well as the testing of any type of weapons". The Treaty does however provide for the "use of military personnel or equipment for scientific research or for any other peaceful purpose".

In this case, the EU considers the Antarctica regime applicable.

3. Natural resources

The EU strongly supports the Danish Arctic Strategy, regarding existing natural resources, including exploitation of mineral resources under the highest international standards; noticeable increase in the use of renewable energy sources; ocean harvest of the living resources in a sustainable way, and exploration of the new economic opportunities in the Arctic, in close cooperation with industries involved, in order to maintain the leading role in the cooperative international research within the Arctic region.

Indeed, the Strategy mentions in particular “new” economic activities and industries in the Arctic, in addition to fisheries, the most important in historical terms. These new industries include hydropower, mining, tourism and exploration of other minerals, particularly off-shore fossil fuels, natural gas and other energy resources that are viewed as critical to the future development of Greenland.

Shipping, other modes of transport and new sea routes receive less attention than other priorities and objectives. The Strategy can be seen as a means to attract new industries to Greenland, and effective investments in them.

4. Transport

Today, tourism, which is the second largest local industry to fisheries, is the most important export industry in Greenland. This industry has a huge potential for further growth in the future. It applies both to land-based tourism and the cruise-liner business. Among the benefits of the latter is that even small towns and villages along the coast can be involved in such tourism, due to their advantageous strategic position. Due to this fact, the EU supports and approves the development of tourism in the Arctic area.

Navigation in the Arctic is increasing, including in the waters around Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Less ice coverage, especially in the summer months, has led to a significant growth in maritime traffic, including cruise ships to areas of Greenland, which until a few years ago, were not possible to navigate there.

For shipping, which is a global industry, this means, that the high international safety standards must be established and applied for all ships navigating within the Arctic waters.

Furthermore, in terms of shipping policy, which aims to promote shipping activities in the Arctic region under high safety standards, such international regulations ensure that ships are competing within a uniform framework, which is crucial for the Kingdom of Denmark, and so is for the EU.

Because of the extreme conditions in sparsely populated Arctic region, prevention of marine vessel accidents is crucial. Preventative measures must be set in place that allow for the prorigressive increase in safe navigation activities within the Arctic waters, while at the same time effectively minimising and ultimately preventing marine accidents, and the same time, mitigating any damage to the Arctic natural environment and natural resources.

5. Environmental issues

The vision is to explore and exploit mineral resources in the Arctic under the best international practices, and in continued close cooperation with relevant authorities of the Danish Realm and international partners.

Greenland and the Faroe Islands will be attractive areas for exploration and management of mineral resources, which must be competent and effective in ensuring that such mineral resources are explored and exploited under the highest international standards of safety, health, environment, emergency preparedness and transparency.

Mineral resource activities will also be carried out with sufficient preparedness, ensuring that the public is kept from harm, (based on the polluter-pays-principle), and that the Kingdom's international obligations can be met in case of major environmental incidents. This should be a model for resource exploitation across the whole of the Arctic.

6. Protection of autochthonous inhabitants

The EU appreciates the opportunities for indigenous people to celebrate their cultural traditions in peace. We call upon all parties involved to ensure that people respect all indigenous heritage, spiritual sites, churches, cemeteries and other sites with spiritual, historical or cultural significance, and that they do not remove any artefacts.

Accuracy and authenticity of the original, genuine local culture and products can be achieved through close cooperation with the Arctic indigenous people.

Greenland and Denmark have a tradition of close and constructive cooperation in the area of ameliorating the conditions of the world's indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are in some situations particularly exposed to possible human rights violation. New challenges requiring urgent attention, such as climate change, also arise.

To the extent that their rights are recognized, which in itself has been difficult at times, one of the major challenges of the EU is to ensure observation of and respect for those rights. Denmark and Greenland possess the necessary experience and historical background, giving them sound credentials to work together to promote indigenous peoples' rights. Their efforts have resulted in the UN, (at the initiative of Denmark and Greenland), having established a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which functions since its foundation in 2002. The Kingdom, as well as the EU, will promote and protect indigenous peoples' rights.

Denmark and Greenland are working in the spirit of cooperation to ensure that the principles outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007 are fully carried out in practice.