

Standpoint of the Kingdom of Norway for the Forum for the 21st century on the Arctic issues

At the very beginning, we, the delegation of Norway, would like to make crystal clear that not only in the recent years, not only today but in the years to come, the Arctic, the so called High North is by our government considered to be of paramount importance when it comes to our foreign policy. Therefore, we would like to express our gratitude towards the Forum for the 21st Century. It came as great news to us that an organization of such importance and relevance to global issues as the Forum, decided, that the matter of geopolitical significance of the High North and its further development, which happens to be Norway's most important strategic priority area, will be the topic of the economic panel present at the Model Conference 2014. We feel honored to be given the chance to transparently discuss and negotiate on a global scale with the fellow members of the Arctic Council as well as possible observers the future of the Arctic. We believe our combined efforts to resolve the utilization of the region will be of peaceful nature and will through mutual understanding and reasonable, constructive compromise result in a conclusion from which we all will equally prosper in accordance to realistic expectations and goals set by each negotiating delegation.

In order to approach the draft composed by the Forum for the 21st century in a way that is accessible, possibly self-explanatory and sufficiently informative, we feel necessary to introduce what we consider to be the essence of our arctic policy, the Norwegian Government's High North Strategy. While the overall objective seems quite general and includes goals most likely shared by all members of the Arctic Council, such as creating sustainable growth and development in the High North, it is the more concrete political priorities that we would like to keep in focus throughout the negotiating process with the intention to utilize opportunities for more extensive international cooperation on the use of natural resources, environmental management and research through closer contact with our Russian, European and North American partners.

Considering the completion of the third draft, we would like to address some of the more concrete issues raised by the Forum for the 21st century.

1. Political division

Firstly we do believe it should be agreed upon that the division of the region among the Arctic states is to be respected as the most crucial point of negotiation. Secondly we believe the criteria for dividing the High North according to the UNCLOS are by far the most appropriate. It would be a shame if this opportunity to settle an issue of such global importance through diplomacy and mutual understanding

was to be rendered useless by one state choosing to nullify the efforts of all other relevant states by not committing to the convention and therefore creating a drastic delay for the resolving of the Arctic problem, which obviously represents a higher priority for some states than it does for others.

2. Security dimension

We find our authority in the High North to be of no question and we intend to exercise it in a credible, consistent and predictable way. Therefore the presence of the armed forces, the police and the prosecuting authority continues to be of great importance. Our government wishes to make it obvious that Norway takes its international obligations seriously.

3. Natural resources & environmental issues

The petroleum activities in the Barents Sea play a crucial role, not only for Norway, but for our partners as well. Should our further activities in this area be of any concern we would like to ensure that a suitable framework for any further development will be provided and will be of good use to both local and regional business hence boosting the competence of Norway in general. This very well could be the Arctic Research Centre for the Incessant Cooperation as the Forum suggested or any similar institution. Our Government also aims to strengthen international cooperation to limit anthropogenic climate change and reduce environmental pressures in the High North. Norway intends to play a leading role in monitoring climate change, environmentally hazardous substances and the marine environment in the region.

The best way to explain our previous statements is to mention the example of Svalbard which is to be maintained as one of the world's best managed wilderness areas. The strict environmental legislation and comprehensive protection measures will be continued and further developed to meet the challenges that will arise as economic activity expands. In the event of a conflict with other interests environmental considerations will prevail. Our contribution to the international efforts to develop knowledge in and about the High North is to be profound and closely linked to environmental management and utilization of resources as well. We do agree there should be no strict limitations to the possibilities of cooperation between the Arctic states. In the context of our High North policy it is mutually vital for us to maintain close bilateral relations with Russia with which we share borders both on land and sea. A number of the challenges in the High North in areas such as the environment and resource management can only be solved with Russia's engagement and Norwegian-Russian cooperation.

4. Protection of autochthonous inhabitants

In Norway it is a common opinion that indigenous people are stewards of cultural values and have specialized knowledge of ways of making a living under difficult conditions which the Arctic offers. The indigenous dimension is an integral part of our policy. Integrated resource management in the High North includes the protection of natural resource base used by indigenous people for their economic activity as well as their traditions and even of reindeer husbandry areas. People-to-people cooperation is an important part of Norway's High North policy. Health, education, culture, sport, child and youth work and volunteer activities are all key components with the idea behind it naturally being the will to foster mutual understanding, stability and development in the Arctic.

We consider the suggestion of establishing the International Fund for Protection of Autochthonous Inhabitants to be reasonable and of great value. Working as intended such a fund covers most if not all of our concerns and goals regarding the protection of autochthonous inhabitants and we see no reason for opposing the idea.

All the aforementioned issues form the core of our policy and we will be glad to discuss any further details and steps-to-be-taken once the process of actual negotiation has begun. We sincerely hope our contributions will help decide the outcome in a matter acceptable by all parties and prosperous to the Arctic region itself. Once again, at the very end, we feel the need to express our gratitude for this opportunity to bring the Arctic into its next era and we are looking forward to being a part of the cooperation and finally wish the entire Forum for the 21st century best of luck with the Model Conference 2014 and with all the rest of their future endeavors.

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