



The Arctic region: a new arena of geostrategic importance

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On 13 April, the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) in association with the Delegation for Northern cooperation and for relations with Switzerland and Norway and to the EU-Iceland Joint Parliamentary Committee and the European Economic Area (EEA) Joint Parliamentary Committee (DEEA), organised a public hearing on the latest developments in the Arctic region.

The hearing was chaired by AFET Chair, David McAllister, and welcomed various experts in Arctic affairs:

- Research Professor, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Ms Elana Wilson Rowe;
- Rear Admiral of the Royal Danish Navy, Managing Director, Naval Team Denmark, Mr Nils Wang;
- Assistant Professor in the Strategic and Operational Research Department (SORD) in the Centre for Naval Warfare Studies at the US Naval War College and Arctic Strategy Advisor in the Office of the Secretary of Defence of the US (Policy), Ms Rebecca Pincus;
- Chairman of the Alphen Group, Senior Fellow of the Institute for Statecraft and Author, Future War and the Defence of Europe (Oxford University Press), Professor Dr S. Julian Lindley-French;
- EU Special Envoy for Arctic Matters, Mr Michael Mann.

Geopolitical & security matters

MEPs discussed the main geopolitical challenges and opportunities that are emerging in the rapidly-changing Arctic region in the fields of security, trade and development, and exploitation of natural resources, as well as their possible repercussions on Arctic governance.

Ms Elana Wilson Rowe (NUPI) briefed the participants on Arctic governance, saying that there is a promising track record of governance cooperation in the region. The changing physical nature of the macro area has generated leadership on several binding regional agreements to govern novel and increased activity. As the Arctic Ocean opens, however, it is important to build on current international legal regimes and structures.

A vital region for Europe

Mr Julian Lindley-French (Alphen Group) addressed the issue of "hard security". The Arctic is becoming an increasingly contested region and the EU is not prepared to deter any possible war, let alone fight any, a responsibility that would fall primarily to NATO.

He argued that both China and Russia have their own interests in the Arctic region (natural resources, the Northern sea route, economic opportunities), thus the EU should not seek to control the Arctic. The region is of vital European interest, but the EU must ensure that no single party exerts control over the region.

Ms Rebecca Pincus (US Naval College) referred to the Arctic shipping routes and civil security, noting that Arctic warming has drawn attention to emerging shipping routes through the Arctic Ocean. These routes offer potential time and fuel savings on shipping between some northern ports in Asia, Europe, and North America. Of the three major routes, the Northwest Passage, the Transpolar Route, and the Northern Sea Route, only the latter represents a commercial interest.

Natural resources and multilateralism

Mr Nils Wang (Naval Team Denmark) focused on the exploitation of natural resources. He explained the technicalities of the rules on the delimitation of

Exclusive Economic Zones foreseen by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and commented on the issue of the exploitation of rare earths in Greenland, in the light of the recent local elections.

The EU Special Envoy for Arctic matters, Mr Michael Mann, briefed MEPs on EEAS' and DG MARE's (the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries) joint work on updating the EU's Arctic policy. While the competition for resources and global geopolitical rivalry are important, the Arctic is about much more than this, explained Michael Mann.

EU Arctic policy

He added that the EU is willing to work with its partners to achieve a robust balance between the need for precaution and preservation of the environment, of resources and of culture and, the desire to economically develop the Arctic region and their resources to the benefit of local inhabitants and the green transition.

Referring to the EU's current Arctic policy, as set out in [the Joint Communication from April 2016: An Integrated European Union Policy for the Arctic](#) , he reminded that it is built around three priority areas: 1) climate action and environmental protection; 2) sustainable development; and 3) international cooperation.

Sustainable development

"A safe, stable, sustainable, peaceful and prosperous Arctic is important not just for the Arctic itself, but also for the European Union and actually for the whole world", Mr Mann underlined.

In this sense, the Arctic is a key example of why we need multilateral cooperation. The EU aims to preserve the Arctic as a region of peaceful cooperation, to slow the effects of climate change, and to support the sustainable development of Arctic regions to the benefit of future generations.

The 14th Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region

Another important event for the Arctic, the 14th Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, took place on 13-14 April. The conference touched upon important issues such as climate change, security, citizens, the impact of Covid-19 in the region and the Arctic 2050.

DEEA Chair, Mr Andreas Schwab, participated in the debate on climate change and referred to the EU Arctic policy. He underlined that there is a need for coordinated and coherent approach in global efforts to fight the climate change.

Arena of global competition

He stated that the EU has a lot of potential to strengthen its role as a constructive partner and a reliable ally in the region and the issues like climate change can be best addressed through regional and multilateral cooperation.

Mr Schwab referred to the issue of Arctic being turned to an arena of global competition, as a consequence of the new challenges and opportunities arising due to the climate change and changing geopolitical environment. He concluded by stressing that low tension and international cooperation should remain the norm in the Arctic region.

Units in charge: *AFET & DEEA secretariats*

More information:

[AFET website](#)

[DEEA website](#)

[Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region website](#)

[The way forward for the EU Arctic policy and the EU-Russia relations in the Arctic - EXPOnet article](#)

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