

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0084/08

pursuant to Rule 108 of the Rules of Procedure

by Diana Wallis, Bilyana Ilieva Raeva and Johannes Lebech, on behalf of the ALDE Group
to the Commission

Subject: Arctic governance in a global world

It is now over 20 years since Gorbachev's speech in Murmansk when he challenged the Arctic States to form 'a genuine zone of peace and fruitful cooperation' in the far North. Over that period several key and critical issues – pollution, climate change leading to the opening of hitherto closed seaways, resource use, sustainability, security of energy supply, fish stocks – have merged, which have focused attention on the High North. At the end of May 2008 the five countries bordering the Arctic, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the USA, adopted a declaration (Ilulissat Declaration) which seeks the application of the international law of the sea to the Arctic but is against the conclusion of a specific legal agreement for the Arctic. This is of significant importance for the international community and all potential Arctic players. It is of particular interest to the EU, which counts three Arctic nations amongst its Member States and an additional two neighbouring states closely related through the EEA, in addition to which economic, environmental and research issues dictate that the EU cannot be indifferent to the Arctic region.

1. In order that the EU should take a more proactive role towards the Arctic region and specifically with regard to the security, economic and environmental dimensions in the High North, could the Commission identify the possible elements of a sustainable and comprehensive EU strategy in order to face these challenges?
2. As the Arctic is currently not yet governed by any multilateral norms and regulations, as it was never expected to become a navigable waterway or an area of commercial exploitation, is the Commission of the opinion that the current governance structures in the High North are sufficient to deal with the nascent and existing issues? With regard to the last International Polar Year in the 1950s which led to the signing of the Antarctic Treaty, is the Commission of the opinion that, e.g., a binding Arctic Charter could be a solution?
3. As the EU has already an interest in the Arctic, through the Arctic Window of the Northern Dimension policy and through the various policy areas, e.g. energy security, climate change, maritime issues or fishing, how is the Commission aiming at improving the coordination of its policies in these areas and when it comes to mapping out a 'real' holistic Arctic or High North policy?

Tabled: 04.09.2008

Forwarded: 08.09.2008

Deadline for reply: 15.09.2008