

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0060/09

pursuant to Rule 108 of the Rules of Procedure

by Véronique De Keyser, Jan Marinus Wiersma and Hannes Swoboda, on behalf of the PSE Group to the Council

Subject: Opening of negotiations designed to lead to the adoption of an international treaty on protection of the Arctic

The Commission communication to the Council and the European Parliament on the European Union and the Arctic region (COM(2008)0763) of 20 November 2008 provides an excellent description of the problems of protecting and preserving the Arctic and promoting the sustainable exploitation of its resources. As the communication points out: 'There is no specific treaty regime for the Arctic. No country or group of countries has sovereignty over the North Pole or the Arctic Ocean around it.'

Account must be taken of the technological and environmental developments which have occurred since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Montego Bay, 1982)¹.

There is a danger that territorial disputes in this zone, where economic interests may be significant, could make it a theatre of major conflicts between countries wishing to protect - including militarily - what they see as their national interests. Geopolitical neutralisation would enable cooperation between the European Union and the circumpolar nations to be extended.

Does the Council not think that the regional security of the Arctic is of concern to the European Union and not merely to the countries bordering the zone?

What steps does the Council plan to take to make the Arctic a zone of peace and cooperation, reserved solely for peaceful activities and free of disputes over sovereignty, and to develop security cooperation in the Arctic?

Is the Council prepared to pursue the opening of international negotiations designed to lead to the adoption of an international treaty for the protection of the Arctic, having as its inspiration the Treaty on the Antarctic, as suggested by the European Parliament in its resolution of 9 October 2008 (P6_TA(2008)0474)?

Does the Council intend to include the Arctic in the agenda for the forthcoming EU/Russia summit?

Tabled: 17.03.2009

Forwarded: 18.03.2009

Deadline for reply: 08.04.2009

¹ See Treaty on the protection of the Arctic environment by the Arctic Study Group