

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0061/09

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 Commission

Subject: Opening of international negotiations designed to lead to the adoption of an international treaty for the 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.

Does the Commission not think that the threat to the Arctic environment warrants a response at the level of international law commensurate with the challenges faced and that only an international monitoring system can ensure the protection of this unique environment?

Does the Commission not think that a binding Arctic charter along the lines of the Treaty on the Arctic, as proposed by the European Parliament in its resolution of 9 October 2008 (P6_TA(2008)0474), could offer a solution to the problems described by the Commission in its communication?

What specific amendments could the Commission propose to the provisions of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in order to strengthen the international rules on maritime traffic safety in the particularly sensitive parts of this region? Would the Commission support a 'polar navigation code' for the Arctic to safeguard the region's security?

Has the Commission opened negotiations with the Russian authorities to guarantee freedom of navigation and right of passage and ensure that no discriminatory practices are followed, especially as regards charges, compulsory services and rules and regulations, so as to ensure the viability of new shipping routes?

Would the Commission support a 50-year moratorium on the exploitation of the Arctic's geological resources, pending fresh scientific research?

Tabled: 17.03.2009

Forwarded: 19.03.2009

Deadline for reply: 26.03.2009

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