



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from : General Secretariat

to : Delegations

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Subject : Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the
Council: The European Union and the Arctic region

Delegations will find annexed an information note from the Commission on the above subject,
which will be dealt with under "other business" at the meeting of the Council (Environment) on
4 December 2008.

**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council:
The European Union and the Arctic region****Information Note from the Commission services**

- The Arctic is among the last pristine areas on Earth, located in the immediate vicinity of Europe. Climate change and human activities are rapidly transforming it with significant repercussions for the European Union. EU policies in areas such as the environment, including in particular climate change, maritime affairs, energy, research, fisheries and transport have a direct bearing on the Arctic. The time has come for the EU to address Arctic challenges in a coordinated and systematic manner, in cooperation with Arctic states and communities. The European Commission and the High Representative for the CFSP have already highlighted the impact of changes in the Arctic, calling for the development of an EU Arctic policy.¹
- The Communication, which was adopted by the Commission on 20 November, provides a comprehensive review of EU interests, involving matters of Community and of shared competence. It proposes action around three main policy objectives: i) protecting and preserving the Arctic; ii) promoting sustainable use of resources; iii) enhancing Arctic multilateral governance. The Communication can be regarded as the first layer of an EU Arctic policy. It is also an important step forward in implementing the Integrated Maritime Policy.

¹ Climate change and international security – paper from the High Representative and the European Commission to the European Council of 14 March 2008.

- The Communication deals with a range of Arctic-related topical issues. The balance between environmental protection and the use of resources is the most important among them. Protecting the environment and ensuring sustainability are priority goals defining the whole Communication. However, the Communication acknowledges that the exploitation of hydrocarbon resources will go ahead in the Arctic and could bring economic benefits. Consequently, it proposes that EU support for sustainable resource utilisation should be given only if there is full compliance with strict environmental standards. It also stresses the need for free and equitable access to newly opening Arctic navigation routes, in full observance of strict environmental standards. It recommends close dialogue with communities living in the Arctic, involving the contentious issue of marine mammals.
- Recognising the role of the coastal states in matters relating to the Arctic Ocean, the Communication spells out the need for broad international engagement. It acknowledges that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea provides the legal base for Arctic multilateral cooperation. Nevertheless this cooperation can and should be strengthened and adjusted to the changing circumstances. The Communication recommends that the Commission ask for observer status in the Arctic Council.
- Developing their proposals, Commission services have had informal consultations with the Arctic EU Member States (Denmark, Finland and Sweden), with the Presidency as well as with Arctic coastal states (Canada, Iceland, Norway, Russia and the United States).
- The Commission looks forward to close cooperation with Member States and all stakeholders in the more detailed reflection launched by the Communication.
