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Subject: Council Conclusions on the Arctic

Delegations will find attached Council conclusions on the Arctic as adopted by the Council on 20 June 2016.

Council conclusions on the Arctic

Foreign Affairs Council, 20 June 2016

1. The Council welcomes the Joint Communication on an integrated European Union policy for the Arctic (JOIN(2016) 21 final) adopted on 27 April 2016 by the European Commission and the High Representative. In this context, the Council recalls its conclusions adopted on 12 May 2014¹.
2. The Council emphasises the importance of a safe, sustainable and prosperous Arctic. Noting increased global attention and activity in the Arctic region, the Council recalls that the EU has a strong interest in building on and further developing its existing cross-sectoral engagement in the Arctic. An ambitious cross-spectrum and well-coordinated Arctic policy will contribute to the EU's engagement in an increasingly strategically important region. The Arctic is an area of active cooperation between major regional and global actors; reinforcing the EU's engagement in the Arctic is also important from a foreign and security policy point of view.
3. While recognising the primary responsibility of the Arctic States, the Council considers that many of the issues affecting the region can be more effectively addressed through regional or multilateral cooperation. The EU can make a significant contribution not least in regional and multilateral fora which deal with Arctic matters, in particular the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Northern Dimension. Other partnerships are also important, including the Transatlantic Ocean Research Alliance.
4. The Council agrees that the EU shall continue to engage with Arctic indigenous peoples and local communities to ensure that their views and rights are respected and promoted in the ongoing development of EU policies affecting the Arctic.

¹ Council Conclusions of 12 May 2014 on developing a European Union policy towards the Arctic Region.

5. The thematic and geographical focus and policy responses outlined in the Joint Communication rightly place the emphasis on sustainable development and use of the Arctic while safeguarding its delicate environment and important ecosystems.
6. In this context the Council recognises the need for urgent global action to reduce and prevent the significant risks posed by climate change and environmental impacts in the Arctic region caused notably by global activities. In particular in the area of climate change mitigation and adaptation, the EU and its Member States must ensure ambitious and coherent solutions with local and global impact, including through the implementation of commitments made in regional and multilateral environmental agreements, not least the Paris Agreement on climate change of December 2015. In this context, the Council recalls its Conclusions adopted on 15 February 2016².
7. Acknowledging the EU's and its Member States' central role in supporting sustainable development and innovation, the Council welcomes the Commission's efforts to strengthen synergies between various funding instruments aiming to enhance sustainable regional development in the Arctic through the establishment of an Arctic Stakeholder Forum with respect for participants' standing and competences, and subsequent conferences as announced in the Joint Communication.
8. Recalling its firm support for freedom of research in the Arctic region, the Council agrees that Arctic science and research efforts by the EU and its Member States complement each other and bring key contributions across the thematic areas addressed in the Joint Communication, also with regard to research infrastructures. While welcoming the intention to maintain high funding levels for Arctic-related research under Horizon 2020 and while maintaining a balanced regional funding, the Council invites the Commission to work at all levels to achieve synergies across EU funding programmes as well as between national, circumpolar and international monitoring and research programmes - including space programmes - and to continue efforts to improve research quality, the data collection and observing capability in the Arctic through international cooperation.

² Council Conclusions of 15 February 2016 on European Climate Diplomacy after COP21.

9. The Council welcomes EU participation in the negotiations on an international agreement to prevent unregulated fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, in a field which falls under the EU's exclusive external competence. Further, the Council welcomes EU and its Member States engagement in work related to area-based management, including marine protected areas, in close cooperation with and with respect for regional stakeholders, organisations and processes, as well as within multilateral institutional frameworks. As regards maritime safety and pollution prevention, the Council also welcomes the adoption, by the International Maritime Organisation, of the International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters, and encourages its implementation and enforcement.
10. Building on a precautionary approach aimed at enhancing the environmental resilience of the region, the Council invites the Commission to explore ways in which the EU can contribute to the sustainable development of industry and climate-resilient infrastructure, including low-carbon, innovative cold-climate technologies and telecommunication in the Arctic, in accordance with inter alia TEN-T plans and policies. Strengthened trade and business cooperation, a dynamic framework for establishing and developing Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) as well as sustainable tourism in the Arctic can be important factors contributing to socio-economic development and resilience of local communities and the region as a whole, including regarding indigenous economic activities making a contribution to subsistence and development.
11. The Council encourages close cooperation between EU institutions and Member States in the context of Arctic challenges. In regional and multilateral frameworks as well as bilateral cooperation and political dialogues with Arctic partners and other partners engaged in Arctic affairs, the Council calls upon the High Representative and the Commission to address issues of relevance to this region on a regular basis. Furthermore, the Council underlines the key importance of continued close cooperation with local communities, indigenous peoples as well as civil society organisations and business representatives. The EU looks forward to the early implementation of its observer status in line with the Arctic Council's Kiruna Declaration of May 2013. The Council also stresses the important role played by EU Member States in the Arctic Council as members and observers in promoting cooperation in the Arctic in accordance with their respective status.

12. The Council invites the High Representative and the Commission - in accordance with the division of competence between the EU and its Member States - to continue to actively implement and follow-up on the commitments highlighted and to closely monitor climatic, environmental, maritime and socio-economic developments in the region and to report to the Council regularly.
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