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Task Force on Improved Connectivity in the Arctic
Reykjavik, 11-12 December 2018

Draft summary submitted by co-chairs

Marjukka Vihavainen-Pitkänen (Fl) and Freja Lisby Nielsen (KoD) co-chaired the fourth meeting of the Task Force on Improving Connectivity in the Arctic (TFICA). The meeting was held at Nordens Hus in Reykjavik. In total, 23 participants attended the meeting including all Arctic States, the Aleut International Association (AIA) and the Emergency Prevention Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR). Two Observers attended the meeting: Germany and Italy. The Arctic Council Secretariat provided secretarial support.

In her opening remarks, Senior Arctic Official of Iceland, Ms. Bryndís Kjartansdottir, noted the importance of connectivity on many levels. Ms. Kjartansdottir also briefly presented the Icelandic Chairmanship program where sustainable development will be at the core.

Prior to the meeting, a draft agenda and a first draft report had been distributed among the participants.

On the first day, the meeting started with a general overview of all the parts of the report and an update on the work that had been done by the drafting group since the meeting in Copenhagen. As this was the first draft of the report, a considerable amount of time was spent on how to organize all the information that the TF had received and produced since its first meeting in Helsinki in November 2017. Special attention was paid to the structure and content of the Executive Summary, as well as to the way of presenting contributions from the private sector, the Arctic States (case studies), the Arctic Council’s Working Groups and external bodies, which are the key elements of the report. Some states and the EPPR Working Group argued for a thematic approach, since this would be in line with the general Arctic Council trend.

Russia suggested to strengthen the report and open up for a broader context by making references to different global processes directly or indirectly dealing with connectivity issues, such as the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. The balance of the different chapters in terms of contributions from all the states was also discussed.

There was a general agreement to keep the pop-up boxes with information about the companies, AC subsidiary bodies and external bodies that contributed to the work of the TF. However, some states argued that some of the content in the pop-up boxes would have to be altered (future success) and yet others stressed the importance of being careful with highlighting future plans and coverage since these were subject to change.

In regards to relationships with other parties, it was agreed to further reach out to the working groups to try to get some input as provided by the EPPR and CAFF, especially from PAME and SDWG. It was agreed that the information received from the working groups would have to be processed and synthesized into one coherent text. EPPR also asked to revisit their submission following the discussion in Reykjavik.
The general discussion was followed by a presentation by the Arctic Economic Council (AEC) and an update on the Indigenous Connectivity Summit 2018. In his presentation, Mr. Heidar Gudjonsson from the AEC pointed to the fact that there are areas between Europe and North America, which are not covered by GNSSs or any augmentation systems. A better coverage in this area would improve safety of shipping in the Arctic and increase SAR capabilities. Furthermore, he highlighted the possibilities for an increase in data centers in the Arctic due to favorable temperatures. The AEC also stated that there is further need for regulatory frameworks and harmonization. Representatives of Canada and the US gave an update from the Indigenous Connectivity Summit 2018 which had taken place in Inuvik, Northwest Territories in October. Geographical barriers, complex environment, issues around funding, questions about open access, transparency and spectrum/licenses were some of the key take away from this conference.

Following these presentations, the Task Force took a closer look at different parts of the report.

The second day of the meeting was mostly focused on the findings and recommendations of the Task Force. When discussing recommendations for future work there was general consensus that it is important to keep focusing on connectivity. Several ideas were discussed such as a joint task force between the AC and the AEC. The idea of a Sherpa or a special representative engaging with key stakeholders and industry working on further improving connectivity in the Arctic received positive feedback from the group. How this would be organized and funded was yet unclear, and it was agreed that the drafting group would explore these solutions further and provide a new draft including recommendations which would be circulated among the States.

In terms of visual material like graphs, maps and pictures (in particular pictures showing connectivity related activity in the Arctic), there was in general support that having such material would improve the report and make it more readable. States were asked to submit any such material by 31 December. It was underlined that all visual contributions should have a proper license or a permission from the author to be used.

Observer state Italy gave a brief update on the NARWHALS project (Navigation in the Arctic With GNSS High Accuracy Low power Solution). The project aims to realize a service capable of providing high accuracy positioning by monitoring and mitigating the ionospheric impact on GNSS navigation in the Arctic sea.

A new revised timeline was presented and discussed and sent out to all TFICA delegates after the meeting together with a revised version of the draft report.

The states were tasked to review their case studies submissions by 31 December. It was also decided to host a teleconference for the TFICA at the end of January/beginning of February 2019.

The meeting in Reykjavik was the fourth and final meeting of the Task Force. The co-chairs expressed their thanks and appreciation for all the work the participants had put into the TFICA and extended their appreciation to Iceland for hosting the fourth meeting and to the Arctic Council Secretariat for its consistent support.