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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION ON ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORK OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

The EU welcomes this opportunity to present its remarks to the Arctic Council at the occasion of its 12th Ministerial meeting on 20 May 2021.

We deeply regret the pervasive impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. While this has also affected the Arctic Council, we congratulate the Icelandic Chairmanship for successfully steering the work and driving operations forward with a clear commitment to preserving the constructive relations among members, permanent participants, observers, staff and other interlocutors.

This Council is the primary circumpolar forum addressing the immense challenges of sustainable development across the Arctic regions. Climate change and environmental transformations are dramatically visible in the Arctic on a daily basis. Much of the work done under the auspices of this Council is therefore logically directed towards science and research in these broad fields.

The social dynamics in the various regions are also very important to local inhabitants and not least the indigenous peoples who are seeing their cultures and livelihoods affected. Overall demographic forecasts point to declining populations in key areas.

Against that background, it is no surprise that the economics of the Arctic are attracting much attention from local authorities, state authorities, potential investors from around the world, civil society, think tanks, international institutions, etc. The desire to increase the socio-economic space across sectors is understandable; robust environmental considerations will be very important.

While the Arctic States have the primary responsibility for tackling issues within their territories, many of the issues affecting the Arctic regions can be more effectively addressed through regional and multilateral cooperation. In many regional and multilateral fora, the EU and its Member States are working together on data collection, setting objectives, and negotiating agreements with international partners of relevance to the Arctic.

The EU's engagement in the Arctic Council

The EU is engaged in several Arctic Council Working Groups, Task Forces and Expert Groups. This work is being conducted by staff from several Directorates-General (DG) of the European Commission and/or EU agencies, currently primarily from the Joint Research Centre (DG JRC), DG Research and Innovation (DG RTD), the DG for Environment (DG ENV) and the DG for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE). At the level of SAOs, the External Action Service and DG for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) represent the EU.

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AMAP - Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme:

DG JRC attends the annual AMAP meetings; provides expertise to assessments of Short Lived Climate Pollutants and on Mercury and attends the meetings of the associated expert groups.

The EU-PolarNet initiative supports 22 European research institutions to develop an integrated EU Polar research programme and facilitates the coordination of data and infrastructure between all partner organisations. AMAP sits on the steering committee of this initiative and is a beneficiary of EU-PolarNet.

The EU finances a project to contribute to developing collective responses to reduce black carbon emissions in the Arctic region and regions with impact on the Arctic (transboundary air pollution) and to the reinforcement of international cooperation on the Arctic environment. The AMAP Secretariat is the implementing organisation.

CAFF - Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna:

DG JRC participates in the steering committee of the ARCTIC Fire project under the CAFF Working Group.

EPPR – Emergency Prevention Preparedness and Response:

DG JRC participates in the Circumpolar Fire project, offered support to wildfire monitoring in the Arctic and has begun to attend EPPR Working Group meetings.

PAME - Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment:

DG MOVE has been engaging in the work of the Shipping Expert Group.

DG JRC participates in the Expert Group developing the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter in the Arctic (ML-RAP).

SDWG - Sustainable Development Working Group:

DG JRC attends SDWG meetings and provides expertise on resilience, renewable energy and the water-energy-food nexus to SDWG projects.

TFAMC - Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation:

The EEAS and DG MARE participated in the SAO Marine Mechanism (SMM) sessions in the autumn of 2020 and DG ENV gave a presentation in the thematic session on Ecosystem-Based Management.

EGBCM - Expert Group on Black Carbon and Methane:

DG JRC has previously contributed to the Task Force on Methane and Black Carbon and continues to contribute to the EGBCM.

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Joint Communication on an integrated European Union policy for the Arctic

On 27 April 2016, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy published the Joint Communication on an integrated EU policy for the Arctic. It has three main pillars: climate change/safeguarding the Arctic environment; promoting sustainable development in the region; and supporting international cooperation on Arctic issues. Science, research and innovation have a key role to play across these substantive areas. The EU is engaging with all Arctic partners including indigenous peoples.

The EU has decided to update its Arctic policy during 2021.

With our best wishes for a fruitful ministerial meeting and productive work under the coming Russian Chairmanship, we look forward to continuing our constructive interaction with this Council in the coming years.