

**Outlines of the Statement by Sergey Lavrov
at the 12th Ministerial Meeting
of the Arctic Council**

(Reykjavik, 20 May 2021)

Mr. Chairman,

Colleagues,

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Arctic Council, which remains the leading intergovernmental platform for a depoliticized dialogue in high latitudes. It is encouraging that, we are meeting today in person. We believe that this is a very timely demonstration of unanimity in addressing the issues of the High North. I would like to thank Iceland for its hospitality and organization of our work.

Iceland's two-year Chairmanship has been pretty intense and eventful. Despite the pandemic considerable joint work has been done. Our biggest accomplishment is the agreement reached on the AC strategic plan – the first ever long-term planning document reflecting the member-states' shared vision of the goals to be attended to in the coming decade.

Taking over the Chairmanship from Iceland for the next two years, Russia intends to keep up the "spirit of cooperation", strengthen constructive interaction between all member-states and increase our willingness to work out best solutions for the Arctic and its inhabitants. We believe it is important to ensure the continuity of the Council's agenda as well as projects and initiatives launched earlier.

We all agree that primary responsibility for what is happening in the region rests with the AC member states. We support the idea of conducting an Arctic summit once the necessary international situation is ripe. If this happens during Russia's Chairmanship, we are willing to organize it. A well-prepared summit will

be a significant step in identifying long-term strategic tasks of the Arctic cooperation.

As the largest Arctic State, Russia considers promotion of sustainable development of the region in its social, economic and environmental dimensions to be a priority for the Arctic Council. We believe it is necessary to strengthen the Council's leading role in the collective efforts aimed at tackling the problems the region is facing. At the same time, it is important to foster synergies with other regional platforms.

The Arctic is the territory of peace, stability and constructive cooperation. We are pleased to note that all our partners share this view. We are convinced that the prosperity of the Arctic can only be ensured through concerted efforts. It is important to extend the positive relations that we have within the Arctic Council to the military sphere, as we reiterated more than once, primarily by resuming multilateral dialogue on military issues between the Chiefs of General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Arctic States.

Russia calls for focusing our joint efforts first and foremost on improving the well-being and quality of life for people in the Arctic. We believe it essential to improve accessibility of services in such fields as education and healthcare; expand humanitarian, including youth, exchanges; support endeavours aimed at preserving the identity and heritage of Indigenous peoples of the North in keeping with the goals and objectives of the 2022–2032 International Decade of the World's Indigenous peoples. Let me refer in this regards to one specific project proposed by Russia and endorsed by all other Arctic Council states – project on digitalization of linguistic and cultural heritage of the Indigenous peoples. This online platform is to be launched already next year.

Russia intends to fully contribute to further adaptation of the region to global climate change. To these ends, it is necessary to continuously improve the environment monitoring system, work to minimize the anthropogenic impact on the environment and ensure the implementation of the 2015 Paris climate agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is important that

we focus on preserving the biodiversity of the Arctic, its unique ecosystem, on preventing marine and land pollution, as well as improve our practical interaction to jointly respond to these and other challenges.

Against the backdrop of climate change, ensuring sustainable and safe maritime activities in the Arctic is of particular relevance. The rapid development of navigation in the region contributes to the diversification of transport routes between the Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific Region. The Arctic is playing an increasingly important role in ensuring global energy security as well as in collective efforts towards the transition to climate-neutral economy.

I would like to underline the necessity to pay close attention to the efforts of the Arctic Council subsidiary bodies in the interests of implementing the Polar Code and agreements reached at the International Maritime Organization. We advocate for further collaboration within the Arctic Coastal Guard Forum, expansion of its cooperation with the Arctic Council with a view to enhancing rapid emergency response capacities.

We consider it important to reach a consensus on the working modalities of a funding mechanism for the Council's project activities aimed, *inter alia*, at reducing environmental pollution in the Arctic and developing practical environmental cooperation between the Arctic States.

We stand for the swift entry into force of the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated Fishing in the High Seas of the Central Arctic Ocean signed in 2018. We regard it as a serious step towards promoting an ecosystem-based approach to the management of marine resources in the Arctic.

We believe that the key to a greater economic potential of the polar region is a comfortable environment for investment. At the same time, economic development should be carried out in accordance with high environmental standards and with respect for the traditional way of life of the local population. It is important that representatives of the business community working in the northern latitudes demonstrate social responsibility and work to strengthen relations with the region's Indigenous peoples.

We stand for further interaction between our Forum and the Arctic Economic Council. We support the expansion of business cooperation between individual subarctic regions and the establishment of ties through local chambers of commerce and industry.

We attach great importance to promoting scientific cooperation in the Arctic, including through the expansion of joint maritime research activity in high latitudes.

Russia consistently stands for strengthening the Arctic Council as a key format for intergovernmental cooperation in the Arctic region, for continuing the practice of regular contacts between our structure and other organizations operating in the High North.

I would like to reiterate, that Russia is committed to close and constructive engagement with all Member States, permanent participants, observers and other interested non-regional partners. We are convinced that "the spirit of cooperation" inherent in our organization will help to strengthen trust and mutual understanding in the region as a whole.

In conclusion I would like to thank our partners for kind remarks towards the Russian Chairmanship and for supporting our Programme for the next 2 years that envisages more than 100 events, approved by the Government of the Russian Federation. The motto of our Chairmanship is "Responsible Governance for Sustainable Arctic". More detailed presentation of our Programme was shared with you prior to this meeting.

Thank you for your attention.