

**Statement by Gunnar Wiegand,
Director at the Directorate General of External Relations,
European Commission**

Thank you very much to provide the European Commission with the opportunity today to present its approach on closer cooperation with the Arctic Council.

The EU has a clear Arctic vocation. Three of its Member States are Arctic States and its links with Iceland, Norway and the Danish territory of Greenland are very close. Many of the EU policies and programmes have a direct or indirect effect in the Arctic, including research (more than € 200 M on top of EU Member States contributions), environment, indigenous peoples, transport, maritime policy, fisheries and energy.

The EU is gradually formulating an EU Arctic policy. At the same time, it recognises the EU Arctic member states' legitimate interests and rights in the region. The EU Council of Ministers conclusions of December 2009 set out clear priorities: to protect and preserve the Arctic in unison with its population and to promote the sustainable use of its resources. We would also like to contribute to enhanced multilateral governance, based on the existing Conventions notably UNCLOS, and explore ways of further developing them. Furthermore, the EU is fully aware of the role of the Arctic Ocean coastal states and intends to act in close cooperation with them.

The Commission's collaboration with the Arctic Council continues, irrespective of the 2009 postponement of the decision on our request to become a permanent observer. We believe in the Arctic Council and in its important work. For example, the current 7th EU Framework Programme of Research gives a particular importance to Arctic issues and has provided the lead for one of its human health projects to AMAP, one of the Arctic Council Working Groups. We firmly believe that both sides, the Arctic Council and the EU would benefit from the Commission becoming an Arctic Council permanent observer, since policies and programmes could be much better coordinated with our presence in all AC structures. Our strong commitment to the Northern Dimension policy and our longstanding and good cooperation in the Barents Region, including our membership in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, should also be arguments of

weight to support our application in the run-up to the AC Ministerial meeting in 2011.

Indigenous peoples are important Arctic stakeholders for us. We want to engage in a wide dialogue with them, building on our solid world-wide policy in support of indigenous peoples which is successful and appreciated in other regions of the world. A first meeting with all Arctic indigenous associations was held in Brussels on 9 March.

Let me briefly touch upon 4 areas where the EU can bring practical value added to the work of the Arctic Council:

Search and Rescue (SAR)

The increasing presence of cruise and passenger ships and oil and gas offshore vessels in Arctic waters today, together with the expected future presence of merchant ships in the years to come, makes the need to build a performant SAR infrastructure a matter of paramount importance. Almost 40% of the world merchant fleet is owned or operated by companies and residents of EU Member States. Furthermore many of the ships sailing today in Arctic waters are under EU Member States' flags.

This huge task ahead requires a massive collective effort that can easily go beyond the physical means and capabilities of Arctic States on their own. The EU, through its Member States (Arctic and non-Arctic), and the European Commission is ready to work closely with the Arctic States in order to reinforce the assistance that may be provided for Search and Rescue purposes and other emergencies in the Arctic. The Commission suggests that participation in the Arctic Council's Task Force on Search and Rescue would be opened beyond the eight Arctic States.

Search and rescue related assistance provided by the EU/EC could presently be activated at the request of an EU/EEA Member State or a third country under the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection and the MIC (EC's Monitoring and Information Centre), which mobilise and coordinate rapid disaster relief efforts by Member States' civil protection agencies.

Moreover, powerful systems related to traffic monitoring and surveillance, and to pollution response, operated by the European Maritime Safety Agency in Lisbon (EMSA), could also be of great use and help in the High North. Possible cooperation arrangements or exchanges of systems' information could be envisaged in the future, if requested by Arctic third countries.

Short-lived climate forcers (SLCF)

We fully share your concerns about projected increases in emissions. The EU is a global leader in clean technologies and innovation. Efforts from industry will be multiplied to gradually evolve towards an ultimate "zero-emission-discharge" ship concept for the Arctic. The European Commission fully supports and contributes to the current work in the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to reduce ship emissions and progressively advance towards that goal.

But the fight against climate change in the Arctic region requires action on both short-lived and long-lived gases, including those from regions outside of the Arctic. The European Commission supports efforts of the Arctic Council to get action on Short Lived Climate Forcers off the ground as soon as possible, as long as it does not divert attention from mitigating carbon dioxide and other long-lived gases. One way to support this, is by acting on a larger geographical scale such as through work on the link between Short Lived Climate Forcers and air pollution in the context of the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution which covers the whole of the UN-ECE region and is reflected in the EU's environmental legislation.

Sustaining Arctic Observation networks (SAON)

The European Commission sees the benefits of strengthening and promoting international partnerships and synergies between observing sites and networks in the Arctic. The objective is to avoid duplication of efforts and to allow for funds to be allocated more efficiently when it comes to facilitating operational monitoring as well as strengthening research efforts in the Arctic. The European Commission and the European Environment Agency have many years of experience ensuring effective partnerships and networking on data and information sharing and improving environmental monitoring between EU Member States. We think our extensive observation and research projects have much to offer to SAON, such as *Damocles*, *Thor*, *Acobar* or *ArcRisk*.

Integrated maritime policy

Three years ago the European Commission adopted its Integrated Maritime Policy. Since then the results of this new policy approach are becoming visible across Europe. Integrated Maritime Policy is based on the premise that each sea region is unique and needs individual attention in balancing maritime uses in a sustainable manner involving all stakeholders. With great interest we have taken note of the recent announcement of Norway about the integrated management plan it has developed for the Barents and the Lofoten Area as it appears pursue an approach similar to the policy approach taken across the European Union since 2007.

We realise that many problems the Arctic is facing are caused elsewhere, including in the European Union. We believe that the EU experience in the development of a truly integrated maritime policy can also bear fruit for the Arctic Ocean and would gladly contribute to the AC action relating to ocean management for instance by participating in such projects as the Arctic Ocean Review under the PAME working group.

Thank you very much for your attention.