

## The EGP calls for a new binding legal regime to protect the Arctic

The European Green Party considers conservation and protection of the oceans an urgent matter in the face of the climate and nature crisis. In an Arctic Ocean, rapidly changing due to the melting of the polar ice cap, a more accessible Arctic region is more vulnerable than ever to environmental, industrial and geopolitical military conflicts, calling for an updated, coordinated, demilitarised and low-tension approach to its future governance. Apart from the conservation of the Arctic and its nature, this governance will also prevent military conflicts over the Arctic.

The Arctic holds some of the world's most sensitive and fragile marine areas, in which the marine environment is under a constant threat from human activities. As climate change and rising temperatures cause ice-covered areas to decrease in volume, decision-makers see commercial and industrial opportunities rather than conservatory and preservatory ones. The Arctic is warming up to three times faster than the rest of the planet. The melting of ice and thawing of permafrost in the Arctic further accelerate climate change and have huge knock-on effects for oceans, sea levels and climate stability. Offshore drilling and other oil and gas activities and exploration activities for seabed mineral resources, pose many dangers to the Arctic marine environment, such as operational pollution, rubbish and sewage, an influx of peoples, air pollution, noise and light pollution, and emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, to mention a few. In addition, new opportunities for fishing and shipping threatens the unregulated areas in the Arctic and affect local populations, especially indigenous ones, whose cultures, traditions and languages should be preserved.

While the EU has taken important [initiatives](#) for conservation of the Arctic, the European Green Party wishes to further this stance through specifying the objectives, framework and targets by urging the development of a legally binding regional agreement that regulates and prevents oil and gas and seabed mineral resources oriented operations in the Arctic. The Arctic demands protection under all circumstances, but in the face of a complete meltdown, it needs further protection in accordance with the changing sea ice persistence. The EU should use its economic and political weight to enforce regulatory tools to ensure a moratorium on oil and gas and seabed mineral resources-oriented activities in the Arctic. The EU should use its ability to enforce emission reduction requirements on ships navigating through the Arctic to European ports, including with the EU Emission Trading System, given the fast-growing traffic along the Northern Route, as well as imposing a ban on imports of oil and gas, and seabed mineral resources from the region.

While the Arctic Ocean consists of vast areas which provide for the freedom of the high seas, and the Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Fish Stocks Agreement provide a relevant and extensive overview of the management of the Arctic region, there is no legally binding instrument in which the region is managed. While Regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) exist across international waters, there is a lack of regional management in the Pan-Arctic region for both international as well as territorial waters. Climate change's impact on ecosystems could lead to intensified competition between fisheries, causing stress for the environment. The lack of regulatory instruments in place to ensure sustainable fish stocks and conservation of the marine environment makes the area particularly vulnerable. Today's gap in the coverage of RFMOs across ocean areas together with shortcomings in the international legal framework, calls for a new and updated regime to regulate fishing and the safeguarding of marine living resources in the Arctic. It is necessary to adopt a shared legal regime for conservation and management measures that are binding for the coastal states and states with interest in the area to regulate the overall fishing effort in the future.

The protection of indigenous communities must be at the centre of protecting the Arctic, and there is a need for self-determination of the peoples living in the Arctic especially since the commercial prospects of the warming climate exposes them to the threat of new and intensified colonial pursuits. Thus, it is important to include the indigenous peoples of the areas in the processes of

regulation in order to guarantee that it does not infringe on indigenous rights or pose a threat to traditional indigenous livelihoods.

The changing climate and warmer temperatures have made northern sea areas more available and therefore vulnerable to exploration, and we have yet to see northern coastal states take action to ensure responsible management and protection of the region. The European Green Party considers today's regulatory instruments in place for the conservation of marine living resources insufficient.

The possible exploitation of the known and potential resources of the Arctic and the trade implications of the icefield melting for international trade can also exacerbate tensions between the Arctic States. The militarisation of the Arctic region is a plausible risk for international security and the environment that must be prevented.

- The European Green Party calls on the EU to take the lead in the implementation of a moratorium on the exploration and extraction of oil, gas and seabed mineral resources in the Arctic through a regional binding agreement.
- The European Green Party calls on the EU, as an Arctic stakeholder and a global actor, to play an effective and more ambitious role in the region, taking into account its growing geopolitical significance and the pressing challenges relating to climate change, in order to preserve vulnerable ecosystems and the livelihood of its local populations, including indigenous ones.
- The European Green Party calls for an Arctic-specific legal regime, including all Arctic countries, to ensure the conservation of its marine biodiversity, including the accountability and sustainability in the management of fish stocks, and the respect of UN fundamental principles, notably free prior and informed consent of indigenous populations, and UN guiding principles on business and human rights.
- The European Green Party calls on the European Union to push internationally, including towards non-EU Arctic countries like Norway, Russia, Canada and the United States, for an Arctic-specific legal regime to achieve zero emission and zero pollution shipping in the region.
- The European Green Party calls on the International Maritime Organisation to declare the sensitive ecosystem of the Arctic a NECA/SECA zone and to prohibit ships to use heavy fuel oil, given the destructive impact of black carbon on ice-covered land and sea. The efforts of the EU should not be addressed only to the countries of the Union concerned by the Arctic (Sweden, Finland, Denmark) but it must concern all the Arctic countries, Norway, Iceland, Greenland and Faroe Islands, Russia, Canada, the United States.
- In addition, the European Green Party calls for the inclusion of indigenous Arctic communities (through in particular the Inuit Circumpolar Council) in the adoption of any initiative related to the region. Regions or autonomous states from Members of the Arctic Council (such as Alaska, Northwest territories, Nunavut, Québec and Nunavik, Newfoundland and Labrador, Greenland...) should be involved in such initiatives as well.