

Focus on the High North: Upgrading the EU's Arctic policy and protecting the EU's interests in a rapidly evolving region



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Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union
PE 783.620 – July 2026



STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The Arctic is undergoing its most profound transformation in recorded history, driven by rapid climate change and intensifying geopolitical competition. The European Union (EU) — connected to the region through three Member States, two European Economic Area partners, along with a significant environmental and economic footprint — faces defining questions: what kind of Arctic actor does it want to be and what can it realistically do? This paper not only evaluates the EU's 2021 Arctic policy against its three core priorities but also examines how existing elements can be strengthened and better connected to broader EU frameworks, identifying new and emerging priority areas for EU engagement in a geopolitically transformed Arctic. It argues that the EU's Arctic policy has consistently functioned as a composite umbrella rather than a directed strategy and that the 2026 update represents not just another opportunity to add a further layer, but a critical moment to define what the EU genuinely wants in the Arctic and act upon it.

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PEER REVIEW

This study was subject to an external peer review.

VERSION

Original: English

Manuscript completed in June 2026.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCE FOR THIS PAPER

RASPOTNIK, Andreas, STĘPIEŃ, Adam and ØSTHAGEN, Andreas. 2026. *Focus on the High North*. Brussels: European Parliament, External Policies Analysis and Support Unit.

For in-text citations: RASPOTNIK, STĘPIEŃ and ØSTHAGEN, 2026

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List of abbreviations

AC	Arctic Council
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIA	Arctic impact assessment
AURC	Arctic Urban-Regional Cooperation
BEAC	Barents Euro-Arctic Council
CAOFA	Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement
CRM	Critical raw materials
CRMA	Critical Raw Materials Act
DG	Directorate-General
DG GROW	Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
EEA	European Economic Area
EEAS	European External Action Service
EGD	European Green Deal
EIB	European Investment Bank
EMSA	European Maritime Safety Agency
EPF	European Peace Facility
ESA	European Space Agency
ESS	European Security Strategy
ETS	Emissions Trading System
EU	European Union
IPY	International Polar Year
IPY5	Fifth International Polar Year
IRIS ²	Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite
JRC	Joint Research Centre
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ND	Northern Dimension
NPA	Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
UK	United Kingdom
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USA	United States of America

Executive summary

The Arctic is no longer the zone of peace and cooperation it was once considered to be. Russia's war against Ukraine disrupted the cooperative multilateral architecture — the Arctic Council (AC), the Northern Dimension (ND), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) — on which the European Union (EU) Arctic policy had been premised. China has deepened its Arctic presence. President Trump has repeatedly asserted his intent to acquire Greenland. Finland and Sweden have joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The post-2022 Arctic is structurally different from the one for which the 2021 Joint Communication on A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic was designed.

The EU is deeply implicated in these shifts. Three Member States have Arctic territories; Iceland and Norway are European Economic Area (EEA) partners; the EU's environmental footprint, research funding and demand for critical raw materials (CRM) extend across the region. Yet EU Arctic policy has consistently functioned as a **composite umbrella** — a collection of ongoing activities grouped under a geographic label, without a dedicated treaty basis, a budget line or the directed strategic vision that Arctic change now demands. The 2026 update is not simply another occasion to add a new layer, but a critical moment to answer the questions unresolved since 2008: **what does the EU actually want in the Arctic and how does it move from simply being there to meeting its aims effectively?**

Evaluation of the 2021 policy's three core priorities reveals a mixed picture. On **climate and environment**, the EU's most consequential contributions operate through general policies rather than Arctic-specific instruments, making it difficult to assess their impact and rendering Arctic relevance largely invisible in EU climate documents. Commitments on black carbon were not matched by shipping legislation, and the fossil fuels moratorium proposal was not pursued. On **sustainable development**, cohesion funding remains the most tangible EU contribution to the European Arctic, but the extraction of CRM remains contentious. Structured engagement with Arctic stakeholders — including Indigenous Peoples — has not translated into meaningful influence on the EU policy processes that affect them most. On **peace, stability and cooperation**, the post-2022 rupture has been most severe: the cooperative multilateral architecture has been substantially dismantled, Russian Arctic liquified natural gas imports continue, and the EU's response to Trump's Greenland statements — while reasonably coherent — was reactive rather than anticipated. Science diplomacy and data services remain the EU's most resilient and broadly recognised Arctic contribution.

This paper provides eight recommendations:

1. **Establish an internal Arctic hub. A permanent EU Arctic knowledge hub within the Commission** — with a proper mandate, budget and staff — should be established, reporting to the Special Adviser in a long-term post. An Arctic-proofing mechanism that requires Arctic impact assessments (AIA) for major regulatory initiatives in Arctic-relevant sectors should be introduced at the start of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034 cycle.
2. **Develop a new northern framework.** Termination of the Northern Dimension has left a structural gap with no concrete successor. A reimagined framework should reorient multi-actor cooperation around Norway, Iceland, Greenland and potentially Canada and the United Kingdom (UK), built around three to five concrete sectoral sub-regimes — CRM, maritime security, energy transition, civil protection and connectivity — with genuine co-ownership from the outset and legal architecture preserving the option of future re-engagement with Russia's northern communities.

3. **Anchor the Arctic in the new European Security Strategy (ESS).** The current drafting process is the single most important short-term opportunity to give the Arctic increased strategic weight, more than it has ever held in EU strategic documents to date. This strategy should: name the Arctic as a priority region; frame Norway, Iceland, Greenland and Canada as priority partners; align EU and NATO strategic signalling and mandate an update of the strategic compass to include a dedicated northern security dimension.
4. **Strengthen competence on maritime security and hybrid threats.** Hybrid threats in Arctic waters have risen sharply and hence effective responses are required: close legal and normative gaps; improve domain awareness through interoperable surveillance; strengthen Nordic and NATO partner cooperation; and enhance EU-backed support for community resilience and digital redundancy.
5. **Address the Arctic-space regulatory gap.** EU procurement rules prevent Andøya Spaceport — Europe's only high-latitude orbital launch site — from being used for Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite, simply because Norway is an EEA rather than an EU Member State. The EU Space Act and Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite Regulation must be amended to extend the space single market to EEA partners. The EU should co-fund the European Space Agency Arctic Space Centre planned for Tromsø and open European Defence Fund space programmes to Norway and Canada.
6. **Stimulate flagship projects in Finland, Norway and Sweden.** The Fennoscandian shield holds CRM vital for the green transition and strategic autonomy. EU action should align resource and energy projects with community resilience, demographic sustainability and Indigenous rights — Arctic-proofing regulations, targeting infrastructure investment and funding benefit-sharing mechanisms — to avoid social conflict that risks project abandonment.
7. **Rethink climate change in Arctic policy.** The EU — at less than 6 % of global emissions — has limited direct impact on Arctic climate trajectories. EU policymakers should reflect on whether general climate action should remain a formal Arctic policy pillar and focus instead on tractable Arctic-relevant measures: black carbon, climate adaptation support, permafrost monitoring and long-range pollutant legislation.
8. **Strengthen Arctic science diplomacy.** Science diplomacy is the EU's most consistently recognised Arctic contribution and must be clearly supported in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034. Support should deliver concrete results — prioritising the Fifth International Polar Year 2032–2033, the All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance and filling gaps left by constrained scientific engagement with Russia, China and the United States of America (USA).

1 Introduction: The EU's Arctic policy at a turning point

'The European Union (EU) is in the Arctic. As a geopolitical power, the EU has strategic and day-to-day interests, both in the European Arctic and the broader Arctic region'. With this statement, the European Commission and the High Representative introduced their latest Arctic policy¹. This declaration of confidence has since been widely used by policymakers, while also attracting criticism. This paper starts by briefly engaging with two core elements of that claim: firstly, the meaning and boundaries of 'the Arctic' and secondly, an assertion that the EU holds strategic interests in the region.

As an initial point, it is important to recognise that there is no single Arctic. The circumpolar North is home to some four million people — including Indigenous communities whose presence stretches back millennia — spread across eight states and connected by shared ecosystems, ocean currents, migratory species and pollution pathways that pay no attention to national borders. What ties the region together is not just political convention but physical reality: the same warming dynamics that thaw permafrost in Alaska affect infrastructure in northern Russia; an oil spill in the Barents Sea does not stop at Norway's maritime boundary; moreover, Arctic sea ice loss reshapes weather patterns across the entire Northern Hemisphere.

At the same time, this region has attracted growing external interest from actors far beyond, whose ambitions do not always reflect the priorities and knowledge of its inhabitants. Following the Cold War, the Arctic was deliberately transformed from a theatre of superpower confrontation into a region of cooperative governance, with the Arctic Council (AC) or the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) serving as an institutional expression of a new 'zone of peace' ethos. That cooperative order began to fracture over the past decade, following: Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014; the confrontational and climate-sceptic positioning of the first Trump administration and ultimately Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Each marked a further step away from the spirit of cooperation. China's self-declared role as a 'near-Arctic state' and Trump's repeated assertions of intent to acquire Greenland have reinforced this trajectory, effectively ending the long-standing assumption of 'Arctic exceptionalism'.

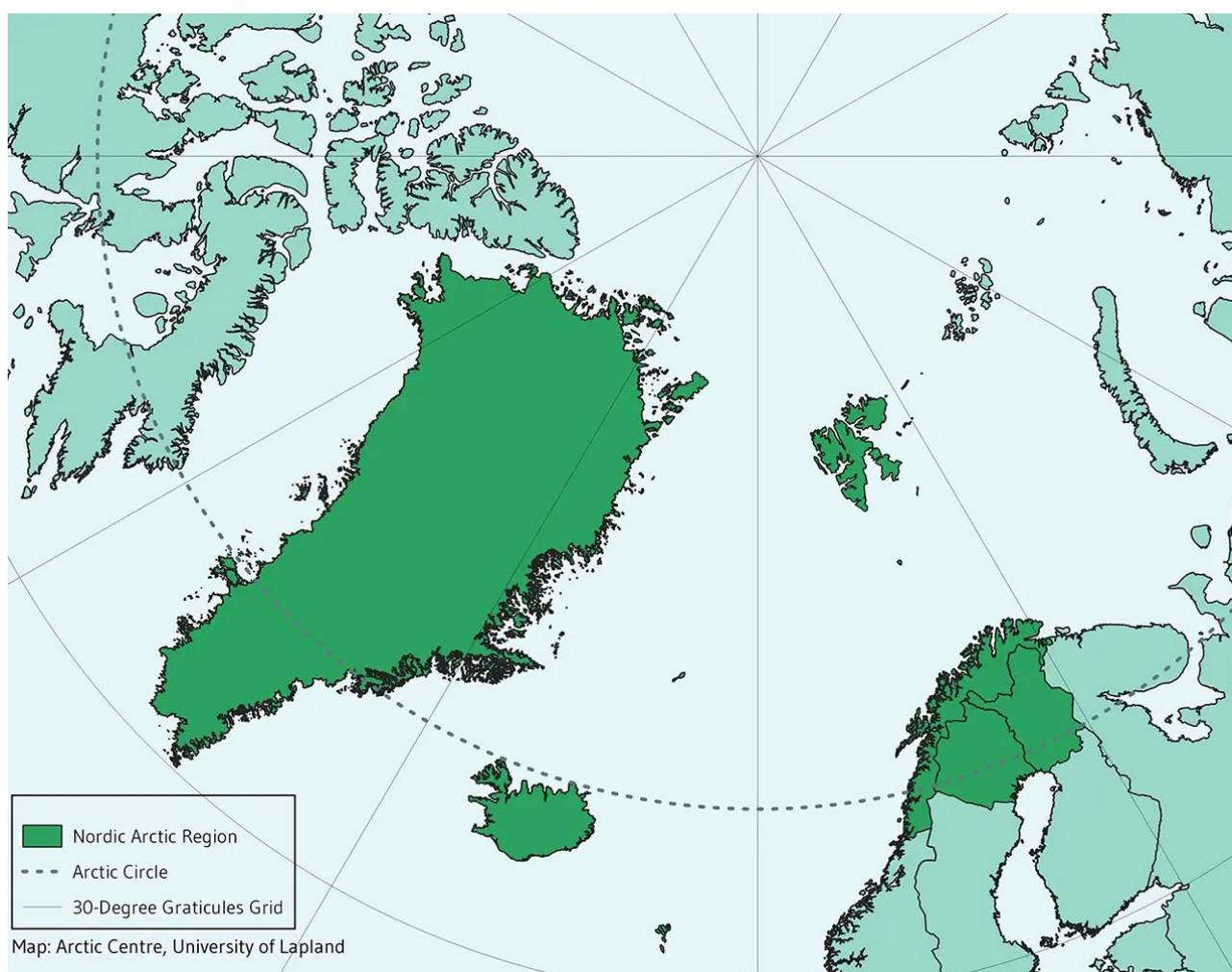
As a further point, what are the EU's strategic interests in that changing region? It is linked to the Arctic through: three Member States (Denmark, Finland and Sweden); its European Economic Area (EEA) partners Iceland and Norway; its environmental footprint; research contributions and its demand for Arctic resources². This transformation raises a series of defining questions: what kind of Arctic actor does the EU want to be? What can the EU realistically do? In which parts of the Arctic does the EU want to be active? Those interests are varied and partly competing. As the world's largest trading bloc and a major industrial economy, the EU has a direct stake in Arctic shipping routes' stability, the security of undersea cables and energy infrastructure in the North Atlantic as well as access to critical raw materials (CRM), essential for the green and digital transitions upon which the EU has staked its economic future. Having said that, as the closest major industrialised region to the Arctic and a contributor to greenhouse gas emissions driving Arctic warming, the EU bears both a responsibility for and a vulnerability to Arctic climate change. This makes environmental protection and sustainable development not merely normative commitments but core strategic interests. Moreover, as a rules-based multilateral actor whose foundational values include sovereignty, self-determination and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the EU has a stake in the kind of governance order that prevails in the Arctic — one that keeps the region subject to international law rather than great-power diktat and one that preserves the voices of those who live there.

¹ European Commission and High Representative, [Joint Communication on A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic](#), JOIN(2021) 27 final, 13 October 2021.

² A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, 'The European Union and the Arctic: A Decade into Finding Its Arcticness', in J. Weber (ed), *Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North Between Cooperation and Confrontation*, Springer, 2020, pp. 131–146.

Additionally, the EU's strategic interests in the Arctic rest on one further analytical distinction that runs throughout this paper. The EU's relationship with the Arctic is not uniform: it operates across two distinct but interrelated geographic spaces. In the European Arctic — Northern Fennoscandia, the North Atlantic and the Barents Sea region — the Union is a key actor, shaping environmental frameworks, funding regional development and applying its legislation through Finland, Sweden as well as the EEA; see Map 1 below for a better visualisation of this geographic domain. In the circumpolar Arctic — the maritime space of the Arctic Ocean and relations with partners such as Greenland and Canada — the EU usually occupies a secondary role. It is somewhat important but not central, a back-seat participant rather than a primary shaper of regional order³. This distinction matters for how the EU's Arctic policy is evaluated and for what it can realistically be asked to deliver. Both dimensions are addressed here.

Map 1: Nordic Arctic Regions



Source: Arto Vitikka, [Arctic Centre, University of Lapland](#)⁴.

³ A. Rasputnik and A. Stępień, 'The European Union and the Arctic: A Decade into Finding Its Arcticness', in J. Weber (ed), Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North Between Cooperation and Confrontation, Springer, 2020, pp. 131–146.

⁴ D. Runfola et al., 'geoBoundaries: A global database of political administrative boundaries', PLoS ONE, Vol 15, No 4, 2020.

1.1 Scope and structure of the paper

This paper supports the update of the EU's Arctic policy at a moment of intense environmental and geopolitical change. It is structured in three substantive parts that move from evaluation to adaptation to forward-looking priorities, framed by this introduction and a concluding set of recommendations.

Part I establishes the paper's analytical baseline by tracing the evolution of EU Arctic policy from 2008 to the present, highlighting its defining characteristic as a composite umbrella policy lacking coherent strategic direction. It situates the 2021 Joint Communication within the broader geopolitical shifts that have transformed the Arctic over the past decade.

Part II provides a structured evaluation of the 2021 Joint Communication's three core priorities: protecting the climate and environment; supporting sustainable development; as well as promoting peace, stability and cooperation.

Part III examines how the 2021 policy's existing elements can be strengthened and better connected to broader EU policy frameworks.

Part IV moves beyond the 2021 framework to identify new and recalibrated priority areas for EU Arctic engagement that are critical to the EU's interests in this 'new Arctic'.

Focus is on the EU as a geopolitical actor — deploying its competences, regulatory power and partnership tools in ways that advance EU interests in the Arctic. Attention is paid to the EU's relationships with Iceland, Norway, Greenland and Canada, as the four partners with whom EU engagement is most directly consequential for the region's geopolitical trajectory, while ensuring that broader coverage of the circumpolar Arctic is maintained throughout.

In conclusion, a set of targeted recommendations is presented.

As its basis, the paper draws on two complementary analytical strands:

- Document review: a systematic review of EU official documents, namely all four Arctic Joint Communications (2008, 2012, 2016, 2021), European Parliament Resolutions, Council Conclusions and peer-reviewed scholarship on EU Arctic policy, EU geopolitics and circumpolar governance, particularly the authors' own extensive work on this subject over the past 15 years.
- Expert interviews: semi-structured, anonymised interviews with officials from EU institutions (the European External Action Service (EEAS) and relevant Commission Directorate-Generals (DG), Arctic policymakers and stakeholders.

Three boundaries shape this paper's analytical choices and should be read as deliberate delimitations rather than omissions:

First, security coverage. Arctic security is a broad concept encompassing hard military security, hybrid threats, maritime and domain awareness, environmental security, human security, societal resilience and so on. This paper does not aim to provide a comprehensive security analysis across all these dimensions. Its security-related sections focus on the areas where the EU has relevant competences or can act as a geopolitical partner — notably economic security, domain awareness, critical infrastructure resilience and the external dimension of hard security — as well as those where EU internal policies (trade, environmental regulation, space) produce Arctic security effects, whether or not explicitly intended. Military defence, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) force posture and bilateral defence cooperation among Member States fall outside this paper's scope.

Second, policy breadth. The EU's Arctic policy encompasses climate action, environmental protection, sustainable development, research funding, Indigenous Peoples' rights and regional cohesion alongside the geopolitical and security dimensions that receive greater emphasis here. Parts II and III address the three

2021 priorities. The geopolitical framing that runs through Part IV and the recommendations is intended to complement, not displace, the EU's broader Arctic agenda — reflecting the European Parliament's 2025 call for a stronger security-oriented strategy⁵ while preserving the comprehensive approach that has characterised EU Arctic engagement since 2008. Broader analytical questions on the EU's response to the changing global roles of China and the United States of America (USA) are not discussed in this study, while their specific Arctic consequences — including for EU Arctic research, science diplomacy, and CRM supply chains — are addressed in the relevant thematic sections.

Finally, on geography. It is useful to clarify the boundaries of what is understood as the Arctic in the context of the EU's Arctic policy and this paper. Primarily, 'The Arctic' cannot be clearly defined as a single region. Definitions such as the Arctic Circle, the 10°C July isotherm and the treeline are commonly used in natural science. The AC applies different regional boundaries in its work. Separately, the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, the Arctic Human Development Report and Nordregio apply definitions based partly on the borders of the northernmost territorial units of the Arctic states, including the Faroe Islands. The International Maritime Organization maintains its own boundary for Arctic and polar waters. This highlights just a few examples of the complexity in defining 'the Arctic'.

Similarly, 'Circumpolar North' refers broadly to areas north of the Arctic Circle. The Arctic Ocean coastal states are the five states — Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (via Greenland), Norway, Russia and the USA — that have coasts and exclusive economic zones bordering the high seas of the Central Arctic Ocean, thus excluding not only Sweden and Finland but also Iceland. The term 'High North' is often used in Norwegian policy and geopolitical discourse when referring to the northernmost parts of Europe, underlining that this is a space with distinct geopolitical, security and socio-economic characteristics⁶.

By contrast, 'High Arctic' is a geophysical term that refers to the areas north of 75°N or 80°N. 'The European Arctic' primarily covers the northernmost regions of Finland, Sweden and Norway, but may also encompass Iceland. Within the EU and EEA cohesion policy frameworks, Northern Sparsely Populated Areas specifically refer to the northernmost regions of Sweden and Norway, together with the northern and eastern parts of Finland. The different terms used to define the planet's northern regions carry political significance and are deployed strategically by actors both within the region and beyond⁷. In this paper, the different terms highlighted above are used in line with the definitions most appropriate to each topic and sector discussed.

2 Part I – Setting the scene

2.1 The EU and the Arctic: A brief policy history

The EU's more focused and intentional engagement with the Arctic has developed gradually since 2008, initially not driven by a coherent strategic vision for the North but by a confluence of environmental concern, institutional ambition and rising global interest in a region that had suddenly become front-page news almost 20 years ago. However, this was not the first time Arctic actors had sought a more engaged EU role. Among earlier efforts, the Northern Dimension (ND) — launched under Finnish leadership in 1999 — had already established a framework for EU engagement in the North. Yet, a persistent gap remained between Arctic-side expectations of EU engagement and Brussels-level delivery⁸. The 2007 Arctic Ocean

⁵ European Parliament, [Recommendation on the EU's diplomatic strategy and geopolitical cooperation in the Arctic](#), 2025/2116(INI), 26 November 2025.

⁶ L. C. Jensen and P. W. Skedsmo, ['Approaching the North: Norwegian and Russian foreign policy discourses on the European Arctic'](#), *Polar Research*, Vol 29, No 3, 2010, pp. 439–450.

⁷ K. Dodds and J. Woodward, [The Arctic: A Very Short Introduction](#), Oxford University Press, 2021; T. Heleniak, [Polar Peoples in the Future: Projections of the Arctic Populations](#), Nordregio, May 2020.

⁸ E. Canova, ['Emergent regions? A historical perspective on Arctic-EU relations \(1970s–2008\)'](#), in L. Heininen et al. (eds), *Arctic Yearbook 2024*, 2024, pp. 1–28; A. Raspotnik, [The European Union and the Geopolitics of the Arctic](#), Edward Elgar, 2018.

summer sea-ice minimum generated a wave of punchy headlines projecting the Arctic simultaneously as a climate catastrophe, an emerging resource frontier and a new theatre of geopolitical rivalry; this mood was further charged when a Russian expedition planted a titanium flag on the seabed beneath the North Pole the same year. Narratives were often simple and sensational: melting ice would unlock vast hydrocarbon and mineral deposits, open new shipping routes between Europe and Asia, thereby triggering conflicts between Arctic and non-Arctic states over territory and resources⁹ — a 'boom and doom' zeitgeist that served as a projection space for many competing interests.

It was against this backdrop that the Commission published its first Communication identifying three founding policy objectives that have since remained constant: (1) protecting the Arctic environment and addressing climate change; (2) promoting sustainable use of natural resources; and (3) contributing to enhanced Arctic governance¹⁰. These pillars have been retained and incrementally elaborated across all subsequent policy updates, reflecting an EU pattern of 'continuity with greater confidence'¹¹. The 2012 Joint Communication, now a joint effort by the Commission and the High Representative, built on the 2008 foundations, adding layers in research funding, climate action, Indigenous involvement and maritime governance¹². The 2016 Joint Communication then embedded Arctic policy within the EU's Global Strategy, explicitly excluding hard security and favouring selective engagement with Russia¹³. Eventually, the 2021 Joint Communication marked the most self-confident articulation of the EU's Arctic role to date. Declaring that the EU 'is in the Arctic' and positioning itself explicitly as a geopolitical power with strategic and day-to-day interests in the region, the 2021 update introduced stronger language on security and strategic foresight, for instance by acknowledging Russian military activity in the region and calling for a (controversial) moratorium on hydrocarbon extraction in the Arctic¹⁴.

What all four (Joint) Communications shared was a fundamentally composite, umbrella character: rather than constituting a strategy in the conventional sense, EU Arctic policy has consistently been a cross-section of diverse departmental scopes — maritime affairs, climate, energy, research, transport — grouped under the same geographic label, always simultaneously both domestic and foreign policy, at once internal and external, circumpolar and European Arctic in focus¹⁵. Furthermore, the 'Arctic' appears nowhere in the EU's founding treaties and carries no dedicated budget line in the Multiannual Financial Framework(s) (MFF), with the policy having largely remained a side effect of broader EU priorities — the European Green Deal (EGD), climate law, energy frameworks — rather than a driver¹⁶. Structurally, the 2021 Joint Communication preserved the umbrella character of its predecessors. It synthesised EU-wide priorities — notably the EGD — into an Arctic framing without providing a directive strategy that would: allocate EU

⁹ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, ['The European Union and the Arctic: A dedicated policy for a complex space'](#), in G. Hønneland et al. (eds), *Handbook of the Politics of the Arctic*, Edward Elgar, 2025, pp. 317–330; S. Borgerson, ['Arctic Meltdown: The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming'](#), *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 87, No 2, 2008, pp. 63–77.

¹⁰ Commission of the European Communities, [Communication on The European Union and the Arctic Region](#), COM(2008) 763 final, 20 November 2008.

¹¹ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, ['Continuity with Great Confidence: The European Union's 2021 Arctic Policy Update'](#), *The Arctic Institute*, 28 October 2021.

¹² European Commission and High Representative, [Joint Communication on Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region: progress since 2008 and next steps](#), JOIN(2012) 19 final, 26 June 2012.

¹³ European Commission and High Representative, [Joint Communication on An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic](#), JOIN(2016) 21 final, 27 April 2016.

¹⁴ European Commission and High Representative, [Joint Communication on A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic](#), JOIN(2021) 27 final, 13 October 2021.

¹⁵ P. Dolata, [A Balanced Arctic Policy for the EU](#), European Parliament, 20 July 2020; A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, ['The European Union's polar ambitions: regional geo-policies yet limited geo-strategic vision'](#), *Journal of European Integration*, Vol 45, No 8, 2023, pp. 1181–1197; A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, ['The EU's Arctic Policy: Between Vision and Reality'](#), College of Europe, August 2019.

¹⁶ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, ['The European Union and the Arctic: A dedicated policy for a complex space'](#), in G. Hønneland, et al. (eds), *Handbook of the Politics of the Arctic*, Edward Elgar, 2025, pp. 317–330; A. Stępień, ['Internal Contradictions and External Anxieties: One 'Coherent' Arctic Policy for the European Union?'](#), in G. Alfredsson et al. (eds), *The Yearbook of Polar Law*, Vol 7, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2015, pp. 249–289.

resources; clarify institutional responsibilities across Commission services as well as the EEAS; and resolve the persistent question of what the EU can and should do, as opposed to what it simply is doing¹⁷.

From the outset, the European Parliament and the Council have accompanied and at times driven this process alongside the Commission and the EEAS. Furthermore, the European Parliament adopted its first Arctic Resolution as early as October 2008 — at the same time as the Commission's inaugural Communication — calling for a dedicated EU Arctic policy and, controversially, suggesting an international treaty modelled on the Antarctic Treaty, a proposal that was quickly rejected by the Arctic states. Subsequent European Parliament Resolutions in 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2021 progressively elaborated the Union's Arctic ambitions: the 2011 Resolution was the first to call explicitly for a coherent and unified EU High North policy and argued that the EU had a natural interest in Arctic resource and energy security; the 2014 Resolution urged a unified, coherent strategy with a concrete action plan (a request that has yet to be fulfilled); the 2017 Resolution called for keeping the Arctic a low-tension area and for a ban on oil drilling in Arctic waters and the 2021 Resolution urged stronger multilateral cooperation, coordinated Member States policies, as well as more engagement on climate, digital infrastructure and Indigenous rights. Across this sequence, the European Parliament consistently pushed for greater ambition and specificity than the Commission was prepared to deliver, often attempting to act as an agenda-setter even in the absence of formal legislative competence in the complex domain that is 'the Arctic'. The Council, for its part, translated (Joint) Communications into political guidance through Conclusions in 2009, 2014, 2016 and 2019, each time endorsing the Commission's three-pillar framework while nudging it to reflect evolving geopolitical realities, yet failing to do that with respect to the 2021 Joint Communication.

Similarly, various Member States have equally developed dedicated national Arctic strategies since 2008. Most of these documents explicitly reference the EU's Arctic policy and call for a stronger or more coordinated EU role in the region, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm and with differing views on how far that role should extend.

2.2 Geopolitical and regional shifts in the Arctic

Over the last three decades, the Arctic has become increasingly prominent in international relations. This is driven by climate change, evolving security dynamics among Arctic states — particularly involving Russia — and growing political as well as economic interest from external actors such as China and India, fuelled by shifting resource demands and broader global interests. As a result, Arctic relations have become more fluid and potentially conflictual, while the region itself has gained greater significance in global politics.

In the early 2000s, Arctic Ocean sea ice and ice sheets were disappearing at an accelerated pace, which coincided with new prospects for offshore oil and gas exploration, as well as the opening of shipping lanes through sensitive areas, such as the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage¹⁸. The eight Arctic states — Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the USA — often repeated the mantra of cooperation, articulated in relatively streamlined Arctic policy or strategy papers¹⁹. Typical phrases found in these policy documents highlighted the importance of international cooperation in the Arctic, the need for sustainable development, fundamentals regarding the law of the sea and its primacy in the Arctic.

¹⁷ E. Canova, [‘The European Union and its Member States in the Arctic: Official Complementarity but Underlying Rivalry?’](#), The Arctic Institute, 8 August 2023; A. Stępień et al., [‘The Arctic’](#), in S. Lucarelli and J. Sperling (eds), *Handbook of European Union Governance*, Edward Elgar, 2025, pp. 431–444.

¹⁸ A. Østhagen, [‘Arctic Oil and Gas: Hype or Reality?’](#), The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, 9 April 2013; The Economist, [‘Not so cool: The hype over the Arctic recedes, along with the summer ice’](#), 29 January 2015.

¹⁹ L. Heininen et al., [Arctic Policies and Strategies – Analysis, Synthesis, and Trends](#), International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, 2020; S. V. Rottem, [‘Klima og sikkerhet i Arktis’](#), *Internasjonal Politikk*, Vol 68, No 2, 2010, pp. 183–204.

Deteriorating relationships between Russia and other Arctic states in 2014, following the annexation of Crimea, did not fundamentally change the Arctic states' basic commonality of interests in the region²⁰. The idea of 'Arctic exceptionalism' became inextricably linked to the twin assumptions that the region was not only a cohesive and cooperative space insulated from geopolitical tensions elsewhere but also 'exceptional' when compared to other regions around the world. Although all the other seven Arctic states were quick to condemn Russian actions in 2014 and put in place sanctions in line with the EU's / USA's regime, cooperation in the framework of the AC, the BEAC and various multilateral and bilateral mechanisms continued uninterrupted. However, from 2014 a divergence between the regional cooperative dynamics and global / pan-European security dynamics became more apparent. This dual-track approach almost seems contradictory at times. On the one hand, foreign ministries kept emphasising the governance structures and the Arctic's cooperative spirit. On the other hand, the various armed forces and defence officials kept highlighting increasing military activity and tensions in parts of the Arctic, albeit constrained and low-key.

Although there are a few remaining maritime disputes and no territorial issues in the Arctic — a contrast to other parts of the world — the limited disagreements that do exist, such as differing interpretations of the Svalbard Treaty and the status of Russian Arctic straits, were suddenly viewed in a new light once Russia's willingness to use military force to achieve its strategic goals became clear. Thus, it was not the issues in the Arctic per se that led to a rethink of Arctic geopolitics but reconsideration of Russian intentions and calculations. Differing interpretations of the Svalbard Treaty's application to the maritime zones surrounding the archipelago and discontent with Norwegian environmental rules that limit what is, in principle, free economic access to the islands, could become a source of tensions between Norway and Russia. In the past, when Norway's relations with Russia were generally normal or even friendly in the Arctic context, Norway's actions against Russian fishing vessels operating in the Norwegian fisheries protection zone around Svalbard — which Russia disputes as illegally imposed — led to significant diplomatic incidents and vessel detentions²¹. Similar incidents in the current state of the West-Russia relations may be more consequential.

Simultaneously, the spill-over from NATO-Russia tension (and to some extent China-USA tensions) into specific parts of the Arctic became increasingly apparent from 2014 onwards, both in terms of military operations in the region as well as rhetoric and statements from various officials — sometimes crossing, or even shattering, the imaginary separation between Arctic diplomacy issues and Arctic security issues.

As in the Cold War, the region's strategic importance has grown primarily because Russia is committed to revamping its global military and political position. That, in turn, has led to increased attention northwards. Consequently, new security dynamics have emerged for which there are at least three dimensions:

- Intentions to establish or re-establish capacities that primarily serve the purpose of sovereignty enforcement, emergency preparedness and domain awareness, including bases in Russia's Far East / Eastern Military District.
- Military defence of the Arctic-located important military locations (namely, Severomorsk, the location of the Northern Fleet) and Russian northern territory, especially where it borders NATO countries (Norway and the USA and from 2022, Finland). Here, the 'bastion concept', where Russia desires to uphold a

²⁰ M. Byers, '[Crises and international cooperation: an Arctic case study](#)', *International Relations*, Vol 31, No 4, 2017, pp. 375–402; A. Østhagen, '[High North, Low Politics—Maritime Cooperation with Russia in the Arctic](#)', *Arctic Review on Law and Politics*, Vol 7, No 1, 2016, pp. 83–100.

²¹ A. Østhagen, '[The Myths of Svalbard Geopolitics: An Arctic Case Study](#)', *Marine Policy*, Vol 167, 2024.

defensive perimeter in northern Fennoscandia, remains relevant. For example, this includes the bases on Franz Josef Land²².

- Strategic competition and enhancing the Russian nuclear deterrent vis-à-vis NATO / the USA. For example, this includes rearmament of the Northern Fleet and investments in submarine capabilities, such as the new Borei-A class²³.

Additionally, there is a different element to the Arctic's role in international relations that goes beyond military and strategic security interests, concerns of Russia and subsequently NATO, namely the way the Arctic is being used in global politics involving China and the USA. In contrast to what was the case during the Cold War, China has also emerged as an actor in the North²⁴. Initially, China's interests were described primarily through an economic lens, with emphasis on shipping²⁵. China released its first and to date only Arctic policy in January 2018²⁶. In it, the country describes itself as a 'near-Arctic state', which can be perceived as having not only the right to become involved but also a duty to do so. China's entry into the Arctic policy realm has, though, elicited reactions, leading to the Arctic becoming relevant in the increasing global power competition between China and the USA. To a lesser extent, this seems linked to Chinese actions in the Arctic; it was more about the USA wanting to stop China's global growth in as many areas as possible²⁷. However, questions about Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic and the effects that this could have on regional tension are increasingly on the agenda after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

3 Part II – Evaluating the 2021 EU Arctic policy

The 2021 EU Arctic policy's three cross-cutting priorities — environmental protection, sustainable development and peace and cooperation — have proven flexible enough to remain relevant despite the profound geopolitical changes since their adoption. Moreover, they provide an evaluative framework for the analysis that follows. The (Joint) Communications are cross-cutting declaratory frameworks whose primary function is more communicative than strategic²⁸ — directed simultaneously at Arctic decision-makers and stakeholders, the European public as well as EU institutions and services. The group of EU officials dealing directly with the Arctic file is relatively small — a structural feature that shapes both the ambition and the implementation capacity of this policy²⁹.

3.1 Priority 1: Protecting the climate and the environment

The 2021 Joint Communication's first core priority committed the EU to 'addressing the ecological, social, economic and political challenges [...] and taking strong action to tackle climate change and environmental degradation, making the Arctic more resilient, through environmental legislation, concerted action on black carbon and permafrost thaw, and by pushing for oil, coal and gas to stay in the ground, including in Arctic regions'. The EU's most consequential contributions to Arctic climate and environmental protection operate primarily not through Arctic-specific instruments but general EU policies, namely: the EGD, the Fit for 55 package, Emissions Trading System (ETS), blue economy strategy and long-range pollutant legislation.

²² M. Boulègue, [Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic Managing: Hard Power in a 'Low Tension' Environment](#), Chatham House, 28 June 2019; J. Kjellén, [The Russian Northern Fleet and the \(Re\)militarisation of the Arctic](#), Arctic Review on Law and Politics, Vol 13, 2022, pp. 34–52.

²³ T. Nilsen, [Russia launches new Borei-A class ballistic missile sub](#), The Barents Observer, 25 December 2021.

²⁴ A.-M. Brady, [China as a Polar Great Power](#), Cambridge University Press, 2017; T. Koivurova and S. Kopra, [Chinese Policy and Presence in the Arctic](#), Brill Nijhoff, 2020.

²⁵ L. Jakobson, [China prepares for an ice-free Arctic](#), SIPRI, March 2010, pp. 1–16.

²⁶ State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, [China's Arctic Policy](#), 26 January 2018.

²⁷ A. Østhagen, [The Arctic security region: misconceptions and contradictions](#), Polar Geography, Vol 44, No 1, 2021, pp. 55–74.

²⁸ Interview with EEAS Official, online, 18 May 2026.

²⁹ Interview with European Commission Official, online, 13 May 2026.

However, EU documents focused on climate change, air pollution and plastic pollution, including implementation and monitoring assessments, rarely mention the Arctic as a region benefiting from EU legislation and do not assess the scale of this benefit. This limits the understanding of links between EU environmental and climate actions as well as their positive impact in the Arctic, which contrasts with the declared aim of continually assessing the EU's 'own impact on the region'³⁰. While some expert reports have been commissioned in recent years³¹, the lack of such assessments in policy documents, as well as reports issued by EU institutions and agencies, is not only a clear shortcoming but also a missed opportunity.

3.1.1 The EU's climate action and its Arctic dimension

The EU's climate action is the most significant contribution it makes to Arctic environmental protection. In addition to highlighting the Arctic relevance of frameworks such as the EGD, the 2021 Joint Communication's specific commitments include some Arctic measures on black carbon, permafrost monitoring and hydrocarbons. Since 2021, inter alia the European Climate Law was adopted and the ETS was expanded. The EU has indeed achieved a consistent reduction in its carbon emissions³² and the EU's share in global emissions decreases year by year (in 2024, below 6 % of global emissions, compared to around 33 % for China and 12 % for the USA). At the same time, current trends make it unlikely that the EU will meet its 2050 carbon neutrality commitments and 55 % 2030 reduction (compared with the 1990 levels)³³. The EU has also continued to contribute to international climate negotiations. However, the overall effectiveness was undercut by divisions within the EU and a general shift in European politics away from climate priorities. A weakening of the EU's position due to the inability to agree on a clear 2035 target before the 2025 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conference of the parties is a case in point³⁴.

The 2021 commitment to concerted action on black carbon (soot)³⁵ was not matched by the inclusion of black carbon in the EU's major shipping emissions regulations adopted in 2023, for instance in FuelEU Maritime and the EU ETS extension to maritime transport. Furthermore, progress in cutting particle matter emissions (which includes black carbon) within the clean air policy has been slower than expected³⁶.

As declared in the 2021 Joint Communication, the EU has continued to invest in research on Arctic climate change impacts and processes, pollution and socio-ecological changes, including monitoring permafrost thaw and its consequences.

The controversial — for example, strongly opposed by Norway — call in the 2021 Joint Communication to pursue a moratorium on purchasing fossil fuels produced from new extraction in the Arctic has not been actively followed up by EU services. In practice, the post-2022 energy crisis and surge in demand for Norwegian gas mean that any medium-term moratorium on new developments faces a fundamental tension with European energy security needs.

³⁰ European Commission and High Representative, [Joint Communication on A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic](#), JOIN(2021) 27 final, 13 October 2021.

³¹ T. Koivurova et al., [Overview of EU actions in the Arctic and their impact](#), EPRD Office for Economic Policy and Regional Development Ltd, June 2021.

³² European Environment Agency, [Key trends and drivers in greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union](#), 17 April 2026.

³³ European Environment Agency, [Challenging outlook for meeting the EU's long-term environment and climate objectives](#), Press release, 10 December 2025.

³⁴ K. Mathiesen et al., [It's game over for Europe's climate clout](#), Politico, 24 September 2025.

³⁵ European Commission and High Representative, [Joint Communication on A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic](#), JOIN(2021) 27 final, 13 October 2021.

³⁶ European Environment Agency, [Air quality status in Europe 2026](#), 30 April 2026.

3.1.2 Contaminants in the Arctic

The EU's work on long-range pollution is an example of relatively successful EU actions that have clear benefits for the Arctic environment and the health of its people. Since 2021, the EU has made a real legislative effort under the umbrella of the Zero Pollution Action Plan, even if the Commission's own reports³⁷ describe the progress as 'encouraging, though mixed': for instance, only a minority of sites in Europe show levels below the World Health Organization guidelines³⁸. An important development from the Arctic perspective is addressing the per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, legislation on which is currently being developed³⁹. The EU also contributes through its involvement in the relevant international instruments, such as the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. The European Chemicals Agency has supported knowledge-building, which facilitates adding new compounds to the list of prohibited substances, including those identified as chemicals of Arctic concern in AC assessments⁴⁰.

As there has been an elevated focus on macro- and microplastic pollution in the Arctic, EU actions in this area can be seen as valuable for shaping its image and position as a responsible Arctic actor. There has been some success with respect to marine litter⁴¹. There have also been EU bans on the intentional use of microplastics, while limiting unintentional releases from road traffic and polyester clothing⁴² is more challenging. The EU has also been an active participant in ongoing Global Plastics Treaty negotiations, including its engagement with the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution⁴³.

3.1.3 Arctic biodiversity and ocean governance

Action on Arctic biodiversity was highlighted in the 2021 policy document. The EU's current Biodiversity Strategy⁴⁴ includes the target for 30 % of land and sea to be protected by 2030, mirroring the international goals under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Notably, though, the strategy does not even once make any reference to the Arctic. The Nature Restoration Law has been a major achievement since 2021, although critics point out that it has been weakened when compared with original proposals⁴⁵.

Ocean governance and marine biodiversity are among areas where the EU has successfully contributed to policy progress during the last five years. A good example is continued work within the framework of the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA), which introduces a 16-year effective moratorium on commercial fishing in the Arctic Ocean's high seas. The Commission played a constructive role in the successful finalisation of negotiations in 2017 and the Agreement's adoption in 2018. CAOFA involves Russia, with cooperation continuing despite the breakdown of Western-Russian relations. This Agreement also called upon the parties to cooperate on a joint scientific programme and the Commission actively supported this work. The EU has also been involved in work within the International Maritime Organization

³⁷ European Commission, [Report on the Mid-term review of the Zero Pollution Action Plan 'Delivering clean air, ocean, freshwaters and soil'](#), COM(2026) 42 final, 21 January 2026; L. Marelli et al., [Delivering the EU Green Deal - Progress towards targets](#), European Commission: Joint Research Centre, 30 January 2025.

³⁸ European Environment Agency, ['Air quality status in Europe 2026'](#), 30 April 2026.

³⁹ European Chemicals Agency, ['ECHA supports PFAS restriction with targeted derogations'](#), 26 March 2026.

⁴⁰ AMAP, [AMAP Assessment 2020: POPs and Chemicals of Emerging Arctic Concern: Influence of Climate Change](#), 29 December 2021.

⁴¹ A. Cózar et al., ['The Arctic Ocean as a dead end for floating plastics in the North Atlantic branch of the Thermohaline Circulation'](#), *Science Advances*, Vol 3, No 4, 2017, pp. 1–8; C. Halsbrand and D. Herzke, ['Plastic litter in the European Arctic: What do we know?'](#), *Emerging Contaminants*, Vol 5, 2019, pp. 308–318; A. N. Meyer et al., ['Where does Arctic beach debris come from? Analyzing debris composition and provenance on Svalbard aided by citizen scientists'](#), *Frontiers in Marine Science*, Vol 10, 2023.

⁴² P. Boucard et al., [Microplastic releases in the European Union](#), European Topic Centre on Human Health and the Environment, 31 January 2025; P. Ross et al., ['Pervasive distribution of polyester fibres in the Arctic Ocean is driven by Atlantic inputs'](#), *Nature Communications*, Vol 12, No 106, 2021, pp. 1–9.

⁴³ Plastics Europe AISBL, [Plastics the Fast Facts 2025](#), October 2025.

⁴⁴ European Commission, [Communication on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives](#), COM(2020) 380 final, 20 May 2020.

⁴⁵ A. Friedrich and F. Ekaradt, ['Assessing the effectiveness of the EU nature restoration law measured against the CBD target to preserve biodiversity'](#), *Environmental Sciences Europe*, Vol 38, No 16, 2026.

on extending the Polar Code to smaller vessels⁴⁶, as well as establishing large emission control areas spanning the North and Norwegian seas⁴⁷.

A major development is the so-called High Seas Treaty (technically, the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction), which entered into force in January 2026. This agreement is essential for the Arctic, as inter alia it facilitates the establishment of high seas marine protected areas. The EU played a vital role in supporting the adoption of this agreement and is currently working on facilitating its implementation. For example, the EU pledged EUR 40 million for technical assistance with treaty implementation and supported the new treaty's secretariat⁴⁸. The EU also undertook various domestic actions targeting protection of the marine environment, such as adopting the European Ocean Pact, planned revision of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the possible adoption of an Ocean Act. However, none of these documents specifically refer to the Arctic seas, except for a few isolated mentions.

3.2 Priority 2: Sustainable development

The second core priority in the 2021 Joint Communication committed the EU to 'supporting the inclusive and sustainable development of the Arctic regions to the benefit of its inhabitants and future generations, focusing on the needs of Indigenous Peoples, women and the young as well as investing in future-oriented jobs and the blue economy'⁴⁹. Of the three 2021 priorities, this is most anchored in the EU's role as a regional development actor and funding provider in the European Arctic.

3.2.1 EU funding for Arctic sustainable development and cooperation

In 2021, the 2021–2027 MFF's regional funding framework was largely in place, and the 2021 Joint Communication aligned with already agreed objectives. The 'mainstream' operational programmes for Finland and Sweden (including the North Sweden Regional Operational Programme) have supported projects in such areas as innovation, research and development infrastructures, accessibility, green transition and enhanced skills. The Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (NPA) 2021–2027 and the Interreg Aurora 2021–2027 implemented a vast array of territorial cooperation projects.

All told, over EUR 1 billion of EU support has been directed towards the European Arctic. In MFF 2021–2027, sparsely populated northern areas continued to receive a special allocation due to their specific characteristics (about EUR 40 per inhabitant). While relatively limited, this support creates incentives to mobilise local resources and encourages strategic planning. The EU also provides support for Greenlandic education and vocational training systems, contributing to local skills and human resource development⁵⁰. Following its invasion of Ukraine, Russia was excluded from cross-border programmes, such as the Kolarctic Cross-Border Cooperation. These programmes initially operated among Nordic partners alone and were ultimately cancelled.

⁴⁶ European Commission, [Proposal for a Council Decision on the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the International Maritime Organization during the 107th session of the Maritime Safety Committee on the adoption of amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea \(SOLAS\), the International Code of Safety for High-speed Craft, 1994 \(1994 HSC Code\), the 2000 HSC Code, the International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters \(Polar Code\), the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch-keeping for Seafarers, 1978 \(STCW\) and Code and to the International Life-Saving Appliances \(LSA\) Code](#), COM(2023) 181 final, 31 March 2023.

⁴⁷ International Maritime Organization, [New sulphur and nitrogen emission limits enter into force in the Canadian Arctic and the Norwegian Sea](#), 2 March 2026.

⁴⁸ European Commission, ['High Seas Treaty enters into force: A milestone for ocean conservation'](#), News announcement, 16 January 2026.

⁴⁹ European Commission and High Representative, [Joint Communication on A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic](#), JOIN(2021) 27 final, 13 October 2021.

⁵⁰ European Commission, ['Greenland'](#), webpage, nd.

Notable action in recent years was the introduction of the EU's International Urban and Regional Cooperation format to the Arctic. The EU funded a project that established the Arctic Urban-Regional Cooperation (AURC), bringing together 14 Arctic municipalities from across Europe, the North Atlantic and the North American Arctic⁵¹. They worked on joint areas of interest and exchanged good practices. The project is now being transferred to the Arctic Mayor's Forum and can be seen as an important EU contribution to sub-national Arctic cooperation at a time when many regional collaboration frameworks have been discontinued or are in crisis.

As with other parts of Europe, concerns over the competitiveness of European industry have also been expressed by regional and industrial stakeholders in the EU and EEAs' northernmost regions⁵². The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and the EGD industrial plan are examples of general EU actions addressing these concerns, but as yet their impact on competitiveness in the European Arctic is unclear.

3.2.2 Critical raw materials

To enhance Europe's resource security and provide the necessary raw materials for the low-carbon transition, the EU committed — as included in the 2021 Joint Communication⁵³ — to facilitate extractive activities in the European Arctic, while at the same time seeking ways to increase social and environmental responsibility.

The primary driver of EU interest in Arctic CRM is the Union's high dependence on Chinese extraction and processing as well as on suppliers in politically unstable and conflict-affected regions⁵⁴. The options for diversifying supply are limited, with Northern Fennoscandia, Greenland and Canada representing the most viable alternatives within a trusted-partner framework. While Chinese companies were, until relatively recently, highly interested in Arctic mining projects — particularly in Greenland and the Canadian Arctic — this interest has waned considerably in recent years⁵⁵. On the one hand, there has been increasing concern about Chinese capital involvement in strategic sectors: the proposed involvement of Chinese companies in the reconstruction of three Greenlandic airports, for instance, prompted Danish government intervention and a restructuring of the projects' financing. On the other hand, the social and environmental requirements imposed on Arctic projects across different jurisdictions — including free, prior and informed consent processes and complex community impact assessments — have proved discouraging to Chinese actors, unaccustomed to such frameworks. While this forecloses one potential source of investment capital, it also creates possibilities for Western companies to be more active in the North, without competing with Chinese capital. A return of Chinese interest appears unlikely in the short term, given broader geopolitical concerns about Chinese involvement in strategic sectors and the EU's drive to reduce, rather than replicate, its supply chain dependencies.

The key element here is the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA)⁵⁶, which not only sets ambitious domestic extraction and processing targets but also creates a framework of strategic projects that enjoy public financing support, priority permitting and shorter approval timelines. Various Nordic resource developments have been included on the list of EU priority projects, such as the LKAB ReeMap in

⁵¹ European External Action Service, '[Arctic Urban Regional Cooperation: Arctic towns and cities exchanging sustainable development experiences, inspiring positive local change](#)', January 2026.

⁵² OECD, '[Navigating Global Transitions in European Arctic Regions](#)', 9 July 2025.

⁵³ Although the exploitation of Arctic CRM was classified under Priority 1 in the 2021 policy statement, it is examined in this report within the broader framework of sustainable development to maintain thematic consistency.

⁵⁴ European Commission, '[RMIS – Raw Materials Information System: Critical and Strategic Materials](#)', webpage, nd.

⁵⁵ P. Andrews-Speed, '[Chinese involvement in mining in the Arctic: increasing or declining?](#)', The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, December 2025; A. Edström et al., '[Cutting Through Narratives on Chinese Arctic Investments](#)', Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, June 2025.

⁵⁶ European Parliament and Council, '[Regulation establishing a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amending Regulations \(EU\) No 168/2013, \(EU\) 2018/858, \(EU\) 2018/1724 and \(EU\) 2019/1020](#)', Official Journal of the European Union, L 2024/1252, 3 May 2024.

Malmberget, Sweden or the Malmbjerget molybdenum and magnesium project in Greenland, with the latter receiving financing from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and concluding an offtake agreement with the major Finnish and European stainless-steel producer Outokumpu⁵⁷.

Despite developing and promoting social and environmental standards and stakeholder participation, EU actions facilitating domestic extraction remain controversial, as various actors are still deeply concerned about local environmental impacts as well as Indigenous (primarily Sámi) rights and livelihoods⁵⁸. While some measures have been put in place, the EU and Member States are clearly failing to find a way forward for European Arctic extraction without social tensions and resistance. This remains a major challenge for the EU's Arctic policy.

The Commission has worked on maintaining stronger relations with Arctic states and territories with respect to the extraction of CRM, with Canada, Greenland and Norway being central to these efforts. Interactions with Canada about raw materials based on the Canada-EU Trade and Partnership Agreement include regular dialogues on CRM extraction as well as environmental and social responsibility standards. However, Canadian raw materials supply to Europe has not markedly expanded since 2020 and the country remains a relatively minor source within EU resource imports⁵⁹. In Greenland, the EU's office in Nuuk is expected to support cooperation on critical minerals, which dates to 2010 but has so far resulted in little actual investment and trade. A prominent recent exception is the Amitsoq Graphite Project development⁶⁰, which targets the EU market and enjoys the EU's strategic project status. With Norway, the EU signed a Strategic Partnership on Critical Raw Materials in March 2024 under the CRMA framework⁶¹ and Norway features among the countries hosting CRMA strategic projects selected under the Act. Given Norway's significant mineral endowment in the European Arctic, this partnership has more immediate supply chain relevance for the EU than the Greenland and Canada relationships, where investment and trade flows have so far remained limited.

3.2.3 EU relations with Arctic rightsholders, stakeholders and youth

The EU initiated more structured dialogues with Arctic Indigenous Peoples in 2010. These interactions were partly integrated into the EU Arctic Forum — an annual format for EU engagement with Arctic stakeholders (especially the European Arctic), established by the 2016 Joint Communication. The Commission has also engaged in more structured cooperation with the Sámi institutions and organisations, for example, by providing funding to the Sámi Council (the Sámi umbrella non-governmental organisation), to improve engagement with the EU. Several Interreg projects under NPA and Aurora programmes have also supported the Sámi culture, entrepreneurship, transboundary work and institutions.

While appreciated and visible, these dialogues do not necessarily translate into progress in the main areas of tension, namely EU support for domestic raw material extraction and renewable energy production. The Sámi remain formally one among thousands of EU stakeholder groups and therefore have very limited influence over the general EU policymaking processes that affect them. The Arctic Indigenous Peoples' elevated status within the EU's Arctic policy does not mean that their voices are stronger in policy

⁵⁷ E. Thorsson, '[EU to fund Greenland mining project for the first time](#)', Arctic Today, 4 December 2025; EIT RawMaterials, '[Progressing European Strategic Projects: A Landmark Molybdenum Offtake for Europe's Green Steel Supply Chain](#)', 24 November 2025.

⁵⁸ Saami Council, '[EU Promoting Strategic Mining Projects on Sámi Lands: A Devastating Betrayal of Indigenous Rights and Sápmi's Future](#)', 28 March 2025.

⁵⁹ Global Trade Alert, '[Europe's Canada Import Rebound Rests on a Few Big Bets: Oil, Aircraft and Ores](#)', 5 February 2026.

⁶⁰ Naalakkersuisut Government of Greenland, '[The Government of Greenland grants an Exploitation Licence to Greenland Graphite A/S](#)', 9 December 2025.

⁶¹ European Commission, '[EU and Norway sign strategic partnership on sustainable land-based raw materials and battery value chains](#)', Press release, 21 March 2024.

processes that have a pan-European or global character. This reflects the Arctic policy's limited positioning within the EU's policy system.

Furthermore, there is ongoing criticism of the dissonance or contradiction between strong statements on Indigenous Peoples' rights in the EU's external / development cooperation actions and the actual rights in the EU's domestic policies and legislation. This issue was raised by EU policymakers themselves in the 2016 Joint Communication, but has remained a challenge for the credibility of the EU's principled approach. The EU signals commitment to principles such as free, prior and informed consent, but without making statements that could have legal implications (in 2021, the latter is 'encouraged'). This is largely a result of the Union's competence limitations, even if, for example, the selection of strategic projects under CRMA has a direct impact on the Sámi and Inuit.

The 2021 Joint Communication also highlighted a need for the EU to improve its engagement with young people in the Arctic, in line with an overall focus on mainstreaming youth participation across EU policies and its external action. This objective was pursued through a project that facilitated Arctic youth dialogues, including the involvement of Indigenous youth⁶². The youth dimension has been added as the third pillar to the annual EU Arctic Forum events.

3.3 Priority 3: Peace, stability and cooperation

The third core priority from the 2021 Joint Communication committed the EU to 'contribut[e] to maintaining peaceful and constructive dialogue as well as cooperation in a changing geopolitical landscape, to keep the Arctic safe and stable, by raising Arctic matters in its external contacts, intensifying regional cooperation and developing strategic foresight on emerging security challenges'⁶³. Of the three 2021 priorities, this is most directly affected by the post-2022 geopolitical rupture, and hence the gap between declared ambition and operational delivery is widest.

3.3.1 The crisis in multilateral Arctic cooperation

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 fundamentally disrupted the cooperative Arctic order on which the 2021 policy statement had been premised. Within days, the other seven Arctic states suspended cooperation with Russia in the AC⁶⁴. The ND — highlighted in the 2021 Joint Communication as an important vehicle for cooperation in northeast Europe — ceased to fulfil its primary purpose of building linkages with northwest Russia, as cooperation through the ND had eventually been suspended. BEAC cooperation, in which the Commission held full membership (and was a founding member in the mid-1990s), de facto ceased to function following Russia's complete withdrawal in September 2023 and Finland's subsequent departure. AC work has continued, but in severely constrained form: after a period of suspension in activities and limited engagement, all meetings have taken place online and consequently ambitions have been reduced. The AC remains a forum of eight Arctic states, including Russia, although its meaningful involvement appears to be self-constrained. The role of observers — including the EU as an ad hoc observer — has not formally changed, but engagement has clearly been forced to decrease compared to the situation before 2022, albeit for many observers, the involvement was already rather limited. However, EU officials continue to participate in some working groups' meetings⁶⁵. The cooperative Arctic order that the 2021 policy statement sought to sustain has, in effect, been substantially dismantled by

⁶² European External Action Service, '[Youth Together for Arctic Futures](#)', 22 January 2024.

⁶³ European Commission and High Representative, [Joint Communication on A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic](#), JOIN(2021) 27 final, 13 October 2021.

⁶⁴ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, '[The European Union and Arctic Security: First Steps Towards a New Paradigm?](#)', Strategic Analysis, Vol 48, No 6, 2025, pp. 662–673; A. Stępień et al., '[The Arctic](#)', in S. Lucarelli and J. Sperling (eds), Handbook of European Union Governance, Edward Elgar, 2025, pp. 431–444.

⁶⁵ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, '[The European Union and Arctic Security: First Steps Towards a New Paradigm?](#)', Strategic Analysis, Vol 48, No 6, 2025, pp. 662–673; A. Stępień et al., '[The Arctic](#)', in S. Lucarelli and J. Sperling (eds), Handbook of European Union Governance, Edward Elgar, 2025, pp. 431–444.

events largely outside the EU's control or influence. That the 2021 Joint Communication identified multilateral cooperation as a vehicle for stability — rather than as a vulnerability — reflects how profoundly the regional assumptions underpinning this policy had already begun to erode at the moment of its adoption.

The rupture with Russia has also produced an internal contradiction that the EU has so far been unable to resolve. Despite the general framework of sanctions and the suspension of Arctic cooperation, EU Member States continue to import liquefied natural gas from the Russian Arctic at significant volumes — a structural dependency that directly contradicts the spirit of the third 2021 priority and that has proven politically and economically difficult to unwind⁶⁶. Plans to phase out these imports by the end of 2027 at the latest represent a partial acknowledgement of this problem, but continuing flows illustrate the limits of EU capacity to align its economic interests with its declared political values in the Arctic context.

At the same time, it is important to underline that the EU has proved to be relatively flexible in terms of adjusting its cooperation focus and efforts following the crisis of existing Arctic cooperation frameworks. The ongoing ND and European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation projects continued without Russian partners, as Arctic scientific cooperation, for instance, has shifted to the North Atlantic and North America. The EU has also become a more visible collaboration partner within the Nordic cooperation frameworks⁶⁷.

The Russian invasion has not been the only destabilising factor. On 22 December 2024, incoming US President Donald Trump publicly stated that 'ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity'⁶⁸ — framing a potential acquisition in terms of securing Arctic access routes and pre-empting rival powers, particularly Russia and China. The counterreaction from Danish authorities, Greenlandic leadership, EU Member States and international observers was swift: governments in Copenhagen and Nuuk rejected the proposition as an affront to constitutional order and Greenlandic self-determination, while EU institutions made clear their support for Danish sovereignty and the norms of a rules-based international order. The episode has had a net positive effect in one respect — it has catalysed renewed political attention to Arctic security policy across EU institutions and Member States. The coordinated European diplomatic response, including a clear statement from Commission President von der Leyen, demonstrated that the EU could act with reasonable coherence and speed when faced with an acute threat to a partner's territorial integrity. However, the episode also exposed a strategic gap: the EU's response was reactive and values-based — defending sovereignty norms — rather than grounded in a pre-existing, interest-based EU Arctic strategy⁶⁹. Such a strategy would not necessarily have changed the diplomatic response, but it would have provided the substantive foundation it lacked: a track record of meaningful EU-Greenland economic and partnership engagement, pre-agreed response frameworks, and — most importantly — an offer to Greenland of European partnership as an alternative⁷⁰ to the dependency that makes external acquisition interest possible in the first place. Defending sovereignty through diplomatic statements is necessary; however, making that defence credible over time requires strategic engagement with Greenland that the EU Arctic policy has so far promised more than it has delivered.

⁶⁶ M. Humpert, '[EU Countries Continue to Import \\$1bn of Russian Arctic LNG Every Month](#)', High North News, 12 December 2023; A. Raspotnik, '[The European Union and the Emerging Arctic Security Landscape](#)', Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 12 November 2025.

⁶⁷ Interview with European Commission Official, online, 13 May 2026.

⁶⁸ R. Shabad, '[Trump says ownership of Greenland 'is an absolute necessity](#)', NBC News, 23 December 2024.

⁶⁹ A. Østhagen, '[Trump's Greenland Flirt is Clumsy Arctic Geopolitics](#)', The Arctic Institute, 10 January 2025; A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, '[The EU's Arctic Policy: Between Vision and Reality](#)', College of Europe, August 2019.

⁷⁰ R. Habeck and A. Raspotnik, '[Trump is ready to grab Greenland. The EU should move first – and offer it membership](#)', the Guardian, 12 January 2026.

3.3.2 Science diplomacy and research: A relative strength

Science diplomacy is an area where the EU's contribution to Arctic affairs is most consistently acknowledged — including even by those sceptical about the EU's broader Arctic policy ambitions. By January 2025, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe programmes funded 179 Arctic projects with a total EU contribution of EUR 474 million, alongside over 50 additional projects covering both polar regions⁷¹. The EU has also invested in facilitating coordination of European Arctic and polar research efforts. In 2024, Canada was integrated as a Horizon Europe partner country, enabling full participation of Canadian institutions in EU research projects — a concrete example of Arctic-relevant partnership deepening.

Some of the key pillars of the EU's Arctic science diplomacy have experienced disruption due to geopolitical events. The organisation of biennial Arctic Science Ministerial meetings has been halted, which was a high-level forum for scientific cooperation strongly supported by the EU over the years. Russian scientific institutions, which had been important partners in pan-Arctic monitoring and data collection, are no longer able to participate in EU-funded projects.

3.3.3 Civil protection and emergency response

The EU has invested in building emergency response capacity relevant to the Arctic through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, which has been activated a number of times in response to emergencies in Arctic states, including Canada. EU-funded Copernicus services on wildfires, droughts and floods have global as well as pan-Arctic reach and include Arctic-focused tools. Copernicus established a dedicated Arctic Hub and some Arctic decision-makers make use of its services, especially the Global Wildfires Information System. Generally, though, the services remain underutilised by Arctic stakeholders and decision-makers. These contributions to civil preparedness constitute a concrete expression of the EU's commitment and contribution to Arctic stability and safety, but they operate largely below the threshold of political visibility.

Table 1. Evaluation of the 2021 EU Arctic policy: priorities, outcomes and lessons

Priority	Key EU instruments	Outcome and assessment	Lessons for 2026
Climate & Environment	EGD; Fit for 55; Zero Pollution Action Plan; Involvement in long-range pollutant conventions and High Seas Treaty	Consistent EU emissions reductions; Weaker position in global climate negotiations; Plastic pollutants and per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances progress; High Seas Treaty ratification; CAOFA cooperation maintained with Russia; Very little visibility of Arctic impacts and benefits in the EU's general policy documents	Arctic relevance of EU climate actions invisible in policy documents; black carbon omitted from shipping legislation; fossil fuel moratorium not pursued; just transition in European Arctic unaddressed

⁷¹ European Commission, '[Polar and ocean research](#)', webpage, nd.

Priority	Key EU instruments	Outcome and assessment	Lessons for 2026
Sustainable Development	Cohesion/European Regional Development Fund; Interreg NPA and Aurora; CRMA strategic projects; EU-Greenland Partnership; AURC; EU Arctic Forum and dialogues format	Over EUR 1 billion directed to the European Arctic; CRMA strategic projects selected; EU office in Nuuk opened; AURC established; Indigenous rights in green transition an ongoing challenge; New MFF proposal possibly undermining the existing EU support for its northernmost regions	MFF 2028–2034 proposals contain no earmarked funds for sparsely populated northern areas; CRM extraction social acceptance unresolved; stakeholder engagement not influential on major EU policymaking
Peace, Stability & Cooperation	AC (de facto observer); ND; BEAC; Horizon Europe; Copernicus; bilateral relations	Arctic science diplomacy resilient (EUR 474 million, 179 projects); EU-Canada research deepened; Response to Greenland/ Trump coherent; More visibility in Nordic fora	Cooperative multilateral architecture largely dismantled; Russian liquefied natural gas imports contradict stated values; strategic foresight not operationalised; responses reactive not anticipated; no ND/ BEAC successor proposed

4 Part III – Strengthening the 2021 framework: Focus on external relations

Part III examines how existing elements of the 2021 Arctic policy can be strengthened, adapted and better connected to the broader EU policy frameworks that have gained strategic prominence since the policy was adopted. Its focus is not on designing a new architecture from scratch but on identifying where: firstly, the Union's existing instruments, partnerships and commitments can be made more effective and secondly, the geopolitical and security dimensions of EU Arctic engagement can be given greater operational weight. Importantly, this latter issue should avoid displacing the climate, environmental and sustainable development agenda that remains central to EU Arctic policy.

The key analytical lens is EU internal competences' external dimension, namely ways in which EU regulatory and investment decisions, primarily domestic in intent, produce significant Arctic effects and shape the conditions for EU geopolitical engagement in the region. CRMA, the EU's space and earth observation programmes, the Maritime Security Strategy and the civil protection and resilience frameworks are not Arctic policies. However, each has become an increasingly important vehicle for EU Arctic engagement; moreover, each could be deployed more strategically if connected to an explicit Arctic logic. Part III examines how this connection can be made in practice: what would it mean to apply a security and geopolitical lens to these instruments; how can inter-institutional coordination be improved; and where are the most significant implementation gaps that the 2026 update needs to close.

This part maintains the 2021 policy's three priorities structure — climate and environment, sustainable development, as well as peace and cooperation — but reframes each through the question of what more

the EU can do, with what instruments, through which partnerships and in what timeframe. Where Part II identifies what has and has not worked, Part III proposes how to do it better.

The USA's partial disengagement from multilateral Arctic frameworks — including funding cuts to climate and environmental research programmes or the diplomatic disruption caused by the Greenland statements — raises the question of whether the EU should position itself to fill the resulting governance gaps. The honest answer is that the EU's capacity to do so is sector-specific (and hence somewhat limited). In hard security and deterrence, there is no realistic EU substitute for US Arctic military presence; NATO remains the only credible framework and the EU's role is complementary at best. In Arctic research, the picture remains fluid and the scale of US disengagement is not yet clear. As a reliable diplomatic partner for Iceland, Norway and Canada, where the EU does have both the standing and instruments to step forward is in rules-based maritime governance — through the International Maritime Organization, the High Seas Treaty (or the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in general) as well as CAOFA. The revised Arctic policy should be explicit about these boundaries: claiming a broader gap-filling role than the EU can credibly sustain would damage rather than enhance the Union's standing as a serious regional actor.

4.1 Reinforcing climate action and environmental protection

There were concerns over the progress made by global Arctic-relevant environmental frameworks considering the tensions between Russia and the West, as well as the scepticism towards international environmental governance by the first and second Trump administrations. These include: the UNFCCC; long-range pollution conventions; CAOFA; as well as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and its High Seas Treaty. Many soft cooperation instruments and regimes concerning the Arctic have indeed experienced major challenges, such as the AC, BEAC and cross-border programmes. However, the treaty-based frameworks, particularly those involving global powers other than Russia and the West, have seen very limited disruptions, if any⁷². The USA's disengagement from major frameworks, such as the World Health Organization and the Paris Agreement, while certainly a major problem, does not stop the basic operation and progress. Continued EU and Member States' commitment as well as investment in these frameworks should therefore be maintained and possibly strengthened.

It is important to highlight that while climate mitigation efforts clearly contribute to limiting the EU's climate footprint in the Arctic, their implementation also affects regional economies in EU / EEA Arctic states, where due to remoteness, long distances and colder climate, these measures can have a disproportionate impact compared to other parts of Europe⁷³. While the EU has acknowledged the importance of ensuring a just green transition across Europe and has established instruments such as the Social Climate Fund and the Just Transition Fund (utilised in Finnish and Swedish northernmost regions, and to be integrated into consolidated national planning in the post-2028 MFF), the Arctic policy documents have failed to address these European Arctic-specific concerns properly.

Current negotiations on the global plastics treaty are essential for the Arctic. The EU must continue to play a constructive role in concluding the agreement. More importantly, the ratification and effective implementation of this treaty will require resources, technical support and continued momentum. In the Arctic, the EU should support the involvement of Arctic communities, stakeholders, businesses and Indigenous Peoples in global and EU developments on plastic pollution.

⁷² T. Koivurova et al., [Arctic cooperation in a new situation: Analysis on the impacts of the Russian war of aggression](#), Office of the Prime Minister of Finland, 21 December 2022.

⁷³ T. Koivurova et al., [Overview of EU actions in the Arctic and their impact](#), EPRD Office for Economic Policy and Regional Development Ltd, June 2021.

IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

Three gaps require immediate attention. Firstly, the Arctic relevance of EU climate and environmental actions is systematically absent from policy documents, monitoring assessments and agency reports — closing this gap is a readily achievable objective requiring coordination rather than new legislation. Secondly, black carbon remains outside EU shipping legislation despite the explicit 2021 commitment: the revision of FuelEU Maritime and the ETS maritime extension provide the next available legislative vehicles to correct this. Thirdly, climate adaptation and implications from climate and environmental policies on competitiveness as well as economy in Europe's northernmost regions (including just transition) are discussed in policy documents, but concrete actions remain limited. The EU Arctic policy focus should shift from general climate action to Arctic-specific adaptation.

4.2 Deepening sustainable development

4.2.1 Regional development, competitiveness and security

The discussion on regional sustainable development in Europe is increasingly positioned in the context of EU competitiveness, security and more aggressive competition from major economic powers, in particular China and the USA. Furthermore, the development of European Artificial Intelligence (AI) capabilities is seen as a strategic necessity, which will generate further significant demand for resources and energy. The role of European Arctic CRM and renewable energy can be expected to grow. At the same time, opposition to resource and energy developments from traditional land users, including the Sámi, is growing, fuelled by frustration over a lack of meaningful engagement and powerlessness in the face of larger economic and security interests⁷⁴. As a result, important projects may be abandoned due to legal and political challenges, while other projects will create excessive cumulative impacts on Arctic livelihoods and other industries, thereby eroding trust in European decision-making systems.

The EU and its Member States should prioritise promoting the genuine social acceptability of raw materials extraction, especially among key stakeholders and rights-holders, as a strategic necessity. This could be advanced through meaningful discussion on land rights, Arctic land use, local impacts and ongoing limitations of decision-making processes. EU officials are in a difficult position here, as many issues that limit progress fall outside EU competencies or are politically sensitive. Closer cooperation between the EU and its Member States, together with prioritisation of this issue among the latter, is key to progress here.

4.2.2 The next EU MFF: Ongoing negotiations

The MFF development process for 2028–2034 is ongoing and likely to bring significant changes to the structure and distribution of EU funds. Funding is to be more concentrated and integrated, with a stronger role for national-level planning (through highly centralised national single plans, somewhat building on the experience of the Recovery and Resilience Facility). Regional actors in the European Arctic have expressed concerns that this new set-up may be detrimental to the interests of the northernmost regions, characterised by large distances and sparse population. The lack of regional allocation criteria can lead to neglecting the needs of regions with these special characteristics. Northern regions have also utilised the strategic planning impulse provided by the need to develop smart specialisation strategies and there are concerns that this process will not be fully carried through to the next MFF⁷⁵.

⁷⁴ Saami Council, '[EU Promoting Strategic Mining Projects on Sámi Lands: A Devastating Betrayal of Indigenous Rights and Sápmi's Future](#)', 28 March 2025.

⁷⁵ NSPA Steering Committee, '[Position from the NSPA network asking the EU to continue to uphold support for a secure, sustainable and prosperous European Arctic region](#)', Northern Sparsely Populated Areas, 13 March 2026; NSPA Steering Committee, '[Position on the European Commission and European External Action Service consultation on EU Arctic Policy](#)',

Regional policymakers also fear that the role of transborder and east-west transport as well as other connections, critical for the European Arctic, will be less visible in national planning. Local actors highlight the need to consider strategic infrastructures in Europe's north in terms of supply security, namely access to CRM produced in the region⁷⁶.

In the current MFF proposals, there are de facto no funds earmarked for the sparsely populated northern areas, thereby undermining the EU Arctic policy's regional development pillar, as cohesion policy remains the most significant funding framework within EU actions included those under the Arctic policy umbrella. In addition to regional funding distribution based on gross national income, EU policymakers should consider the impact of population sparsity on actual socio-economic needs (a high level of gross national income per person may not reflect socio-economic realities in regions characterised by sparsity, remoteness and the presence of a few large industrial activities), especially if maintaining a resilient population structure is seen as one of the prerequisites for long-term security and whole-of-society preparedness⁷⁷.

IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

Three structural gaps stand out. Firstly, the proposed MFF 2028–2034 contains no earmarked funds for sparsely populated northern areas and aggregates all objectives under single national and regional plans, directly undermining the regional development pillar of EU Arctic policy at the moment of highest Arctic strategic importance — this must be at least partly mitigated before MFF negotiations are concluded, for instance through dedicated chapters and the possibility of selecting key objectives. Secondly, social acceptance of CRM extraction in the European Arctic remains unresolved: without a credible mechanism for meaningful Indigenous and community co-decisions, strategically important projects will continue to face legal challenge and abandonment, wasting both investment and political capital. Thirdly, the temporal disconnection between Arctic policy statements and MFF negotiation cycles means that the 2026 Joint Communication will be adopted before the 2028–2034 MFF is finalised, preventing binding financial and programmatic commitments at the moment of greatest political attention, while the 2026 Arctic policy's content will likely be constrained by the European Commission's tabled budget proposal. The next update must be explicitly timed and sequenced alongside the MFF process.

4.2.3 Arctic science diplomacy for challenging times

Science diplomacy remains the area of greatest EU comparative advantage and the most resilient dimension of EU cooperative Arctic engagement. The EU should use the upcoming Fifth International Polar Year (IPY5) 2032–2033, the All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance and continuing development of the European Polar Coordination Office as platforms for consolidating its role as the primary funder and network-builder for European Arctic science. Russia constitutes roughly half of the Arctic's land area, coastline and seas, with a historically key role in both Arctic (and Antarctic) research. Hence, the ongoing exclusion of Russian institutions from EU-funded programmes poses a significant challenge also for IPY5 planning and EU policymakers will therefore need to consider how meaningful circumpolar scientific cooperation can be facilitated in this context.

Northern Sparsely Populated Areas, 13 March 2026; NSPA Steering Committee, '[Northern Sparsely Populated Areas' \(NSPA\) initial views on the EU's proposal for an overall EU fund under shared management](#)', Northern Sparsely Populated Areas, 27 October 2025; NSPA Steering Committee, '[Northern Sparsely Populated Areas' \(NSPA\) views on the future of Cohesion Policy within the next Multiannual Financial Framework](#)', Northern Sparsely Populated Areas, 18 February 2025.

⁷⁶ NSPA Steering Committee, '[Northern Sparsely Populated Areas' \(NSPA\) position on the future EU budget for transport](#)', Northern Sparsely Populated Areas, 18 February 2025.

⁷⁷ Interview with NSPA representatives, online, 13 May 2026.

Long-term impact of the Trump Administration's funding cuts and policy reorientations on US Arctic research, monitoring and information services is likely to be significant. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration discontinued its long-term Arctic sea ice and snow cover monitoring services, which were widely used by the international scientific community. These included gridded monthly analyses of sea ice extent and concentration — with datasets going back to the 1850s — and the World Glacier Inventory. The National Science Foundation's polar research budget has been reduced by about 15 – 25 %, with priorities shifting away from climate and environmental research toward energy and security. This represents a significant challenge for Arctic science more broadly, given the high levels of international collaboration that characterise this field and the critical role that US institutions and researchers have historically played, including planning towards IPY5.

However, for the EU this shift also represents various opportunities to, inter alia: enhance the promotion of its own data services under Copernicus; develop alternative datasets and tools replacing those which are no longer available or have become highly restricted; invest more strongly in circumpolar Arctic research beyond the European Arctic; and prioritise the strengthening of research ties with Canada.

4.3 Reinvigorating peace, stability and cooperation

The most immediate challenge for reinvigorating the EU's contribution to Arctic peace, stability and cooperation concerns reconstruction, given that the institutional architecture through which that cooperation was conducted has largely been dismantled. The ND, BEAC and fully functioning AC — the three principal frameworks through which the EU had earlier exercised its cooperative Arctic role — have all been severely constrained or suspended as a direct consequence of Russia invading Ukraine. Rebuilding a meaningful cooperative presence in the Arctic, therefore, requires both working with what remains of the existing frameworks and developing new channels that do not depend on Russian participation.

Within the AC, the EU's priority should be to consolidate and deepen its role as a de facto observer (or an 'observer in principle'). In line with the AC's 2013 Kiruna Declaration⁷⁸, the EU is allowed to act as an observer, although the status has not yet been formalised by a unanimous AC decision, as first Canada and then Russia did not agree to formalising the EU's status. In practice, the EU can act as any other observer and has proven to be one of the more engaged observers, providing inputs, for example, via the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) as well as on issues such as black carbon and methane or Arctic maritime transport. This means active participation in working groups — particularly those focused on environmental monitoring, science and shipping — and a deliberate effort to use EU technical expertise, Copernicus data and research funding as contributions that demonstrate the Union's value as a cooperative partner.

On the question of the former Barents cooperation and ND, the appropriate response is neither to attempt recreation of what was lost nor to abandon the institutional memory and the networks that those frameworks built. The BEAC was a genuine achievement of post-Cold War European diplomacy and its suspension is a loss that should not be normalised as permanent. The EU should support maintaining the institutional architecture in a standby mode, preserve the working-level contacts and expertise that were developed over three decades and be prepared to re-engage selectively as and when conditions allow. This could be, for instance, on: environmental monitoring; search and rescue; or public health in the European Arctic. Some degree of practical engagement with Russian counterparts may eventually prove necessary and indeed be desirable by both sides regardless of the political climate.

Similar potential lies with the ND. For 25 years, this policy promoted cross-border cooperation across energy, environment, health and culture. Its most operationally significant component was the Environmental Partnership, which worked through an 'environmental window' for cleaning the Baltic Sea

⁷⁸ Arctic Council Secretariat, [Kiruna Declaration](#), MM08, 15 May 2013.

and a 'nuclear safety window for northwest Russia'⁷⁹. The ND's formal termination in September 2025 has left a structural gap in EU northern external policy and the search for a successor framework has so far produced little of substance. Discussions have taken place at both international and interregional levels regarding the design of a new platform for northern Nordic cooperation, yet when it comes to stronger civil cooperation across the North Calotte, rhetoric has so far not been translated into any significant action⁸⁰. Whether this gap will be filled remains to be seen, but the absence of any concrete successor proposal — either from the EU institutions or from Nordic EU Member States (or Norway) — suggests that the political momentum needed to construct a new framework is not yet present. This points to a deeper and longer-standing ambivalence within the EU about northern priorities as a collective European concern⁸¹, with the ND generally being dependent on Nordic activism rather than a permanent institutional structure⁸².

Yet these accumulated weaknesses also point toward what a successor framework should look like, for instance, comprising more space for strategic partnerships and a European Arctic framing northern cooperation — one built around Norway, Iceland, Greenland and even Canada together with the United Kingdom (UK)⁸³. What gave the old ND its most tangible achievements were not its overarching political declaration but its concrete sectoral sub-regimes — the Environmental Partnership above all — with independent pooled funding, dedicated institutions and clear deliverables⁸⁴. A new northern framework would need to identify its own new frameworks, whether in CRM, maritime security, energy transition, civil protection or connectivity and space, around which dedicated implementation structures could be built from the outset. Crucially, it should also be designed as genuinely co-owned from its inception and anchored in a permanent institutional structure (to avoid such effort being dependent on Nordic activism only). What is now needed is not a simple replacement of the old framework, but a genuine reimagination of what a new 'ND idea' could mean in a Europe where Russia is an adversary rather than a partner.

IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

Three gaps are critical. Firstly, there is no successor framework to the ND or Barents cooperation: no concrete proposal exists from EU institutions or Nordic Member States and the MFF 2028–2034, as currently drafted, lacks the legal and programmatic architecture for future re-engagement with Russia's northern communities. The legal basis must be preserved now, before the MFF is finalised. Secondly, the EU remains absent from the Arctic defence cooperation agreements that most directly affect its Member States and partners — such as the Nordic-Canadian-US icebreaking arrangements — despite holding directly relevant competences in maritime safety, space and civil protection; closing this gap requires a mandate from the new ESS rather than from Arctic policy alone. Thirdly, Copernicus — the EU's most distinctive technical contribution to Arctic governance — remains structurally underutilised by Arctic decision-makers; a targeted awareness and accessibility programme, co-funded under Horizon Europe, should be listed as a deliverable within the 2026 Joint Communication.

⁷⁹ I. Thatcher, [‘The EU and the Future of Arctic Cooperation in the Northern Dimension’](#), Wilson Center, 7 September 2022.

⁸⁰ A. Edvardsson and B. A. Hansen, [‘No New Structure for Northern Nordic Cooperation in Sight?’](#), High North News, 26 November 2025.

⁸¹ A. Rasputnik, [The European Union and the Geopolitics of the Arctic](#), Edward Elgar, 2018.

⁸² A. Haglund-Morrissey, [‘Conceptualizing the “New” Northern Dimension: A Common Policy Based on Sectoral Partnerships’](#), Journal of Contemporary European Studies, Vol 16, No 2, 2008, pp. 203–217.

⁸³ M. Bergmann et al., [Northern Connections: The European Arctic by 2035](#), Center for Strategic & International Studies, 10 February 2026; I. Thatcher, [‘The EU and the Future of Arctic Cooperation in the Northern Dimension’](#), Wilson Center, 7 September 2022.

⁸⁴ A. Haglund-Morrissey, [‘Conceptualizing the “New” Northern Dimension: A Common Policy Based on Sectoral Partnerships’](#), Journal of Contemporary European Studies, Vol 16, No 2, 2008, pp. 203–217.

5 Part IV – Emerging priority areas

The fourth part of this paper moves beyond the 2021 framework to identify new and recalibrated priority areas for EU Arctic engagement that are critical to the Union's interests in a geopolitically transformed region. Rather than asking what the EU's Arctic policy says, it asks what the EU can and should realistically do as a geopolitical actor deploying its competences, its regulatory power, its economic weight and its partnership tools in an Arctic that has changed fundamentally since 2021.

Analytical focus is on the external dimension of EU competences, where, for instance: internal EU policies produce Arctic effects; the EU can act as a partner and norm-setter in security-adjacent domains; and new or deepened bilateral relationships can advance EU interests. Attention is paid to four partners – Canada, Greenland, Iceland and Norway – each representing a distinct channel through which the EU can act more strategically in the Arctic and each presenting specific opportunities that the 2021 Joint Communication either underutilised or did not anticipate.

Looking in more detail: Canada is an increasingly important transatlantic counterpart in a period of US unpredictability; Greenland with strategically significant territory has experienced a fundamental reshaping of its relationships with both Denmark, brought about by geopolitical pressure; as Arctic EEA partner, Iceland's relationship with the EU carries untapped potential and its periodic EU membership interest warrants structured engagement and Norway stands as the EU's most consequential Arctic neighbour and energy partner. Broader circumpolar coverage is maintained throughout, but these four relationships provide the principal anchors for analysis and recommendations here.

5.1 Conceptualising security: Security and defence engagement in the Arctic in the Nordic / NATO nexus

With Russia's resumption of Cold War-style military activity in the North Atlantic around 2005, combined with re-investment in Arctic military bases and capabilities, as outlined previously, the need to address NATO's relative inattention took on a greater urgency⁸⁵. NATO's reduced ability to conduct anti-submarine operations in the North Atlantic and High North was central to these concerns, following years of declining training and exercise activity⁸⁶. Finland's and Sweden's subsequent decisions to join NATO in 2022 – making seven out of eight Arctic countries NATO members by 2024 – further solidifies the divisions and spill-over of tensions to the north. Today, NATO is heavily engaged in the Arctic and High North domain, for instance through launching the 'Arctic Sentry' mission early in 2026 – partly reflecting allied efforts to demonstrate regional commitment following renewed US interest under the Trump administration and to coordinate and demonstrate allied activity better in the High North. Questions remain, though, not only about the scope and sustainability of this engagement but also how NATO's renewed Arctic focus will translate into concrete capability commitments across the different Arctic sub-regions.

Moreover, NATO structure is limited both in its capacity and its mandate. The EU holds a wider range of tools and capacities, alongside funding mechanisms that are increasingly focused on aspects of security and defence matters. At present, the EU and NATO share 23 members and have articulated common values and overlapping goals, albeit they differ in mandate, structure and capabilities. While NATO remains the central institution for territorial defence and hard security, the EU has concentrated its efforts on civilian, regulatory and economic dimensions of security. The Nordic countries are the EU's primary link to the Arctic region. All five are part of NATO today, either as EU Member States or by being connected to the EU through the EEA agreement. Together they set the frame for much of what the EU can collectively achieve

⁸⁵ D. Depledge, '[Train Where You Expect to Fight: Why Military Exercises Have Increased in the High North](#)', *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, Vol 3, No 1, 2020, pp. 288–301.

⁸⁶ J. Gade and P. S. Hilde, '[Nordområdenes sikkerhetspolitiske betydning for NATO](#)', in A. Kjølberg and T. Heier (eds), *Norge og Russland: Sikkerhetspolitiske utfordringer i nordområdene*, Universitetsforlaget, 2015, pp. 96–110.

in terms of security, stability and cooperation. For the Nordics and the EU, this new setup offers various options to manoeuvre, particularly as the Arctic becomes increasingly entangled in global rivalries between China, Russia and the USA. The EU has become diplomatically more active in other northern fora, including the Nordic Council, with the attendance of Commission President von der Leyen at a Council meeting during 2025.

Mainstreaming Arctic matters into dialogues with Arctic states and states active in the Arctic has proven challenging. Concerning its Member States:

The Kingdom of Denmark must manage intricate internal and external political dynamics as EU and NATO interests in the Arctic grow. Although Denmark represents the whole Kingdom in NATO, Greenland and the Faroe Islands have distinct relationships with the EU, requiring careful coordination to harmonise Arctic policies⁸⁷. This internal complexity complicates Denmark's ability to present a unified position in both organisations, particularly given the possibility that Greenland may pursue full independence⁸⁸. The Trump-era episode regarding Greenland has elevated Greenlandic issues — such as funding for security and defence — in Denmark and the EU, but questions remain about the nature of immediate security threats and how to expand Greenlandic autonomy without full independence. Relations with Greenland have been bolstered by the (albeit significantly delayed) opening of the EU's Nuuk office in 2024 and conclusion of updated cooperation agreements under the EU-Greenland partnership framework⁸⁹. These steps reflect a belated recognition of Greenland's strategic importance, amplified also by the Trump administration's statements. Conversely, engagement with the Faroe Islands has been fairly limited over the past six years, despite expressions of interest in the 2021 Joint Communication.

Finland's Arctic policy has shifted markedly since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with NATO accession placing national security and deterrence — including in the Arctic — at the forefront. While NATO will assume primary responsibility for defence, Finland still regards the EU as a central framework for its foreign and security policy, balancing hard-defence priorities with a continued commitment to Arctic stability and cooperation⁹⁰. At the same time, Finland must manage economic ties to China for critical minerals, which complicates strategic autonomy. Given its expertise in Arctic research, strong Nordic partnerships and credibility in EU policymaking, Finland is well-positioned to take a leading role in EU Arctic initiatives, such as: convening Member States; shaping regulatory and resilience measures; and steering EU funding toward sustainable infrastructure, scientific cooperation and crisis preparedness in the region⁹¹.

Sweden is increasingly open to a stronger EU role in Arctic soft security, such as environmental and infrastructure issues, while maintaining NATO as its primary security partner for defence⁹². Sweden's strategy balances using EU resources for Arctic goals and NATO for direct security concerns, particularly in the Baltic. The country's 2026 Arctic Strategy reinforces this picture: NATO is explicitly framed as the primary organising framework for its Arctic security posture, with Russia named as the primary security threat, while Sweden's specific Arctic assets — the Esrange space base, the icebreaker Oden and mineral

⁸⁷ L. A. Mortensgaard and L. W. Christensen, '[Spotlighting the Kingdom: Greenland, Denmark and the Arctic turns of the EU and NATO](#)', in A. Raspotnik and A. Østhagen (eds), *The Nordic States, NATO and the EU in Arctic Security*, Edward Elgar, 2025, pp. 16–34.

⁸⁸ A. Østhagen and A. Raspotnik, '[Nordic Perspectives on Arctic Security](#)', in S. Haldar and C. Giri (eds), *The Arctic at a Crossroads: The Making of a New Frontier*, Observer Research Foundation and Global Policy Journal, 2025, pp. 118–123.

⁸⁹ Interview with European Commission Official, online, 13 May 2026.

⁹⁰ S. Kopra and H. Mikkola, '[Finland in the Arctic: from détente to defence](#)', in A. Raspotnik and A. Østhagen (eds), *The Nordic States, NATO and the EU in Arctic Security*, Edward Elgar, 2025, pp. 35–49.

⁹¹ A. Østhagen and A. Raspotnik, '[Nordic Perspectives on Arctic Security](#)', in S. Haldar and C. Giri (eds), *The Arctic at a Crossroads: The Making of a New Frontier*, Observer Research Foundation and Global Policy Journal, 2025, pp. 118–123.

⁹² N. Khorrami and J. C. Moyer, '[Sweden's Arctic priorities: balancing domestic, European Union, and NATO expectations](#)', in A. Raspotnik and A. Østhagen (eds), *The Nordic States, NATO and the EU in Arctic Security*, Edward Elgar, 2025, pp. 92–110.

endowments — are identified for strengthening, several of which are of direct relevance to EU priorities in space, CRM and domain awareness⁹³.

The EU should further work to strengthen relations with Norway, Iceland and Canada:

- Norway warrants a distinct and elevated strategic partnership beyond the EEA framework. Its relationship with the EU has traditionally been well-functioning, with the Nordic country being more 'in' than 'out'⁹⁴. However, Norwegian emphasis on autonomy in certain areas, especially related to fisheries, other natural resources and foreign and defence relations, has hindered further integration. As the EU's top gas supplier since 2023, Norway plays a key role in the EU's Arctic engagement, but its primary focus on security remains with NATO, particularly concerning Russia. The EU-membership-debate has also emerged in Norway alongside the Trump administration's return and the Icelandic membership debate. However, it is unlikely that any further progress will be made until after the next general election in 2029. Nevertheless, there is ample room for increased cooperation within Arctic-specific areas, especially those related to regional cooperation, research and security issues. As the EU's most consequential Arctic neighbour, a NATO ally, the AC Secretariat's host and state whose security environment is most directly shaped by Russia's Northern Fleet on the Kola Peninsula, Norway occupies a position of unique importance for EU Arctic policy. The Arctic has typically been an area of equal cooperation, where Norway holds a particularly strong and relevant position. Furthermore, the EU needs Norway's acceptance and support in many European Arctic matters, especially where it holds significant leverage in energy cooperation and regional development. More strategic political partnership, outreach engagement and inclusion of Norwegian actors in EU-led initiatives will strengthen these relations further⁹⁵.
 - Areas for deeper structured engagement include: maritime security and domain awareness in the North Atlantic and Barents Sea; the management of fisheries, including avoiding disagreements related to Svalbard's maritime zones from becoming disruptive; CRM and the conditions for resource extraction in the European Arctic; and the integration of Norwegian space and launch infrastructure — including Andøya Spaceport — into EU space and connectivity programmes⁹⁶. Elevating the EU-Norway relationship to a dedicated Arctic strategic partnership, with regular high-level dialogues, would give both sides a mechanism for coordinating precisely the geopolitical pressures — from Russia, from China and from the USA — that neither party can address alone.
- Iceland presents a distinct but equally important opportunity — and one that is particularly timely given the referendum on reopening EU accession negotiations scheduled for 29 August 2026, the first of a two-stage process. As an EEA member and a NATO ally, Iceland occupies a position of strategic significance for the EU's Arctic and North Atlantic engagement that the existing relationship has not fully exploited. As current public debates in Iceland illustrate, though⁹⁷, full EU membership — the second stage — remains uncertain. Iceland suspended its own application in 2015, and Euroscepticism remains a significant political factor⁹⁸, albeit somewhat softened by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Trump's repeated statements on Greenland and the resulting shift in public attitudes toward EU security cooperation. A yes

⁹³ N. Khorrami, '[Sweden's Arctic Strategy 2026: A Critical Overview](#)', High North News, 4 June 2026.

⁹⁴ Departementenes servicesenter, Informasjonsforvaltning, '[Norges offentlige utredninger – Utenfor og innenfor: Norges avtaler med EU](#)', 17 January 2012.

⁹⁵ Interview with Norwegian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, in-person, 6 May 2026; Interview with Representatives from Norwegian MFA High North Section, in-person, 19 May 2026.

⁹⁶ Interview with Norwegian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, in-person, 6 May 2026; Interview with Representatives from EU Delegation to Norway, in-person, 8 May 2026.

⁹⁷ D. Adam, '[EU accession talks vote discussed on RÚV last night](#)', RÚV, 26 March 2026.

⁹⁸ H. K. Hallgrímsdóttir et al., '[Cultural Narrative, Crisis, and Contention in Iceland's Bid to Join the European Union, 2009–2015](#)', *Frontiers in Political Science*, Vol 5, 2024.

vote in August 2026 on reopening accession negotiations would nonetheless mark a qualitative shift in EU-Iceland relations and could open a period of structured engagement with direct implications for Arctic policy. Meanwhile, NATO's presence in Iceland has expanded since closure of the USA's Keflavík base in 2006, underscoring Iceland's security alignment within NATO and the Arctic⁹⁹. Iceland is therefore more likely to cooperate with the EU on 'soft security' areas such as cybersecurity and climate resilience, while deepening its NATO engagement¹⁰⁰.

- Iceland's possible EU accession would somewhat enhance the EU's position vis-à-vis the Arctic and boost the Union's legitimacy as an actor involved in regional affairs. However, while potential accession would add a fourth EU Member State in the AC, this would be more of a symbolic gain than a substantive one — the EU's role in the AC would not change significantly, as three Member States are already present. That said, Iceland's strategic location in the North Atlantic would add some depth to the EU's maritime security posture, though NATO remains the primary framework for hard security in this space. Enlargement may also support stronger EU relations with Greenland, building on existing West Nordic cooperation, including the West Nordic Council. The fisheries sector would, though, be politically complex and a significant sticking point in any negotiations.
- Regardless of the referendum outcome, the EU-Iceland relationship warrants stronger investment. Areas for immediate deeper engagement include North Atlantic maritime safety and search and rescue as well as connectivity and subsea cable infrastructure. The consequences of a negative referendum outcome, or of negotiations that are opened but subsequently suspended, should not be underestimated. Such an outcome would not simply preserve the status quo, it could: reinforce Icelandic Euroscepticism; weaken the political legitimacy of the EEA as a framework; and represent a missed strategic opportunity for EU Arctic policy just as the North Atlantic has become more, not less, geopolitically significant.
- Canada is emerging as a 'new' central partner for the EU's Arctic engagement. Relations have at times been hindered by both geography and differences in approaches to conservation and resource issues (e.g. with respect to the EU's ban on seal products¹⁰¹). However, with Canada's more outward turn and interest in Northern European collaboration, with a particular emphasis on the Nordics¹⁰², there is now scope for further cooperation with the EU on Arctic issues, including discussion on critical minerals as well as environmental and social standards. Moreover, there is an explicit emphasis on security and defence issues. Canada faces certain challenges related to maritime security and domain awareness that are more pronounced than those of any other Arctic state, except perhaps Russia. The EU and Canada already engage, inter alia, through a series of dialogues in the framework of the Canada-EU Trade and Partnership Agreement.

5.2 Operationalising security: Maritime security and domain awareness

In the context of Arctic waters, hybrid threat concerns have been rising since 2014. Actors may be looking to exploit various scenarios to their advantage. For example, the cutting of undersea cables presents a security issue, as it requires clarification on coastal states' rights and obligations to safeguard submarine cables. Determining when a mock attack or potential collision or interference transitions into an armed

⁹⁹ S. B. Ómarsdóttir and G. R. Th. Hauksdóttir, '[In and of the Arctic: security in Iceland](#)', in A. Raspotnik and A. Østhagen (eds), *The Nordic States, NATO and the EU in Arctic Security*, Edward Elgar, 2025, pp. 50-70.

¹⁰⁰ A. Østhagen and A. Raspotnik, '[Nordic Perspectives on Arctic Security](#)', in S. Haldrar and C. Giri (eds), *The Arctic at a Crossroads: The Making of a New Frontier*, Observer Research Foundation and Global Policy Journal, 2025, pp. 118-123.

¹⁰¹ N. Sellheim, '[The goals of the EU seal products trade regulation: from effectiveness to consequence](#)', *Polar Record*, Vol 51, No 3, 2015, pp. 274-289.

¹⁰² Prime Minister of Canada, '[Prime Minister Carney deepens cooperation with Nordic countries in defence, Arctic security, and critical minerals](#)', 15 March 2026.

attack under international law is crucial, as it dictates the appropriate measures that states may justifiably take in response. The establishment of military exercise zones by foreign entities can impede fishing and other coastal activities, potentially breaching international law. In the maritime areas around Svalbard, over-exploitation by foreign vessels of resources would necessitate an examination of measures Norway can legally and politically pursue to counteract such activities. Currently, Norway interprets the Svalbard Treaty as not being relevant for the maritime zones established within international law after the Second World War (including exclusive economic zones and the continental shelf), whereas some EU Member States argue that the Treaty provisions should apply¹⁰³. Finally, naval operations bring to the fore coastal states' rights to impose conditions on foreign warships' passage and naval exercises. Any such activities raise questions about whether they constitute an unlawful use of force or infringe upon the principle of 'peaceful use of the sea'.

Reports suggest that Russia may already be engaging in hybrid operations within Arctic waters¹⁰⁴ with examples such as: disruption of one of the two fibre optic cables connecting Svalbard and mainland Norway¹⁰⁵; suspicious movement patterns of research vessels¹⁰⁶; and the presence of questionable radio equipment on board trawlers¹⁰⁷. Incidents such as the sabotage of Baltic Sea pipelines and fibre-optic cable disruptions in the Baltic and Barents Seas have raised alarms. However, the growing complexity of maritime hybrid threats calls for an enhancement of our understanding across many areas to detect, counter and mitigate such threats effectively. It is also apparent that the Arctic and North Atlantic are intricately linked via geopolitical, security and maritime considerations¹⁰⁸. As the Arctic is part of the North Atlantic, issues such as hybrid threats pose significant security challenges. These utilise a mix of conventional and unconventional tactics, including cyber-attacks, disinformation and economic pressure.

The Arctic's security environment will continue to evolve, particularly with the interplay of hybrid threats, which may include ambiguous military exercises and the use of civilian vessels for covert operations. Whilst the potential for armed escalation remains low, Russia's actions, such as increased vessel movements and infrastructure disruptions, nevertheless escalate regional security concerns. Norway and Finland's proximity to Russia and reliance on maritime domains intensify their exposure to these hybrid threats. Denmark, Iceland and Norway are not only Arctic but also North Atlantic states, linking their security challenges to those of southern maritime neighbours, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the UK, and their western 'neighbours' across the Atlantic, Canada and the USA, which in turn impacts wider security considerations of the North Atlantic and European region.

Within this space, the EU can do more to promote stability as well as the role of legal and regulatory frameworks. Enhancing norms and legal frameworks to address hybrid threats and ensuring maritime security will remain focal points for Arctic states, underpinning stability and cooperation across the North Atlantic¹⁰⁹. Russia's strategic interests, particularly in maintaining access to marine resources and asserting regional influence, persist amidst rising tension with NATO member states. This balancing act between military posturing and multilateral dialogue defines the trajectory of how to deal with these threats.

¹⁰³ E. J. Molenaar, '[Fisheries Regulation in the Maritime Zones of Svalbard](#)', The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law, Vol 27, No 1, 2012, pp. 3–58.

¹⁰⁴ A. Østhagen and C. J. Stensrud, '[Hybrid Warfare at Sea? Russia, Svalbard and the Arctic](#)', Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies, Vol 7, No 1, 2024, pp. 111–130.

¹⁰⁵ B. Fredriksen et al., '[Kabelmysteriene](#)', NRK, 26 June 2022; H. Guldahl and I. Eriksen, '[This is what the damaged Svalbard cable looked like when it came up from the depths](#)', NRK, 26 May 2024.

¹⁰⁶ O. Kibar et al., '[OPERASJON LAZAREV: Slår alarm om kartlegging av Norges kritiske infrastruktur](#)', DN Helg, 22 October 2021.

¹⁰⁷ B. Fredriksen et al., '[Kabelmysteriene](#)', NRK, 26 June 2022.

¹⁰⁸ A. Østhagen, '[Linking Security Debates in The Arctic and North Atlantic: Hybrid Activity at Sea and The Case of Svalbard](#)', Atlantic Centre, March 2025.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with EEAS Official, in-person, 2 March 2026; Interview with Representatives from Norwegian MFA High North Section, in-person, 19 May 2026.

Increasing military activity, coupled with economic projects, underscores the need for a balanced approach to ensure stability and prevent conflict escalation in this sensitive geopolitical theatre.

Moreover, the EU should help to support both politically and financially through regional and research mechanisms, joint Northern European efforts to deter Russian actors from taking advantage of vulnerabilities both on land and at sea. Gaps in legal frameworks and states' ability to have complete domain awareness will inherently entail vulnerability to hybrid activity and action. Greater knowledge and tools which can deter and combat such efforts before they are initiated will increasingly become a central task in all domains, especially those where Russia borders European states. The European Arctic is particularly vulnerable because of its sparse population, challenging geography and Russia's position of relative strength. Here, the EU (and its various institutions and funding mechanisms) is particularly well positioned to enable capacity building across Arctic communities and create joint awareness across the Nordic Arctic states¹¹⁰. This is linked to everything from the purely operational, namely surveillance, domain awareness, monitoring and developing a coherent picture of the security threats along with cross-sectoral activities in the European Arctic, to wider political and public efforts aimed at capacity as well as competence in communities and amongst political leadership.

5.3 The European Arctic as a whole-of-society preparedness region: Combining strategic security for Europe and viable Arctic communities

Defining the European Arctic and its abundant resources as strategic is hardly a new idea and the northern regions have long argued that their needs should be considered important for Europe as a whole. Fennoscandia and Greenland are to provide the EU with CRM and renewable energy necessary for green transition, digitalisation, AI developments, defence manufacturing and strategic autonomy. Northern transport and digital infrastructures (including the dual-use dimension) underpin security of supply, resource access and regional cohesion at both regional and pan-European levels¹¹¹.

However, there is an increasing need for strategic consideration of broader human development in the European Arctic as a precondition for regional and European security. It will be mayors, local businesses and regional services that are both first in line to respond as well as support maintaining long-term resilience. It is crucial to take a broader perspective on security and consider the value of local, well-integrated, culturally resilient and economically viable communities for preparedness and security. Policymakers have to balance and advance synergies between resource and energy developments as well as supporting population and settlement structures that create whole-of-society preparedness for disasters and conflicts. Regional, national and European development objectives need to be considered in this light, and such a perspective is already promoted by regional actors in the European Arctic¹¹².

Firstly, the EU and its Member States need to continue to facilitate investments and enhance their long-term security, while at the same time encouraging a high level of responsibility in resource developments.

Secondly, it is crucial to place these industrial goals in the broader context of regional development. Other economic sectors in the European Arctic, including fisheries and forestry, should also be considered as strategically important for European competitiveness, food security, green transition and strategic autonomy. Encouraging economic diversification is therefore critical for building resilience.

Thirdly, the strategic thinking on security and whole-of-society preparedness in the north needs to consider demographic and socio-economic trends in the European Arctic, including: depopulation of the countryside; changing settlement structure; challenges to maintaining local infrastructure; growth in

¹¹⁰ Interview with Representatives from EU Delegation to Norway, in-person, 8 May 2026.

¹¹¹ Interview with NSPA representative, online, 13 May 2026.

¹¹² Interview with NSPA representative, online, 13 May 2026.

industries such as tourism; and a decline in employment in traditional activities; as well as digitalisation, AI expansion, misinformation and the presence of hybrid threats.

Fourthly, the European Arctic should be considered as a distinctive geographical area for the EU's threats and risk assessment as well as lessons learned and supply concerns. EU services, systems and infrastructures designed to support preparedness and response should be assessed specifically from the perspective of their utility in the special conditions faced by Europe's northernmost regions.

Fifthly, northern Nordic societies have proven to be resilient, exemplifying whole-of-society preparedness, partly due to the conditions of a sparse population and a challenging climate, which call for cooperation and heightened personal responsibility. Europe's northernmost regions can serve as examples of social, cultural, legal and policy systems that could enhance resilience in other parts of Europe.

5.4 The internal dimensions of EU Arctic policy: Interests, coherence and institutional leadership

The EU has progressively sought to define itself as a geopolitical and security actor, albeit its foreign and security policy remains structurally distinct from that of a conventional state or military alliance. EU foreign policy operates across three overlapping systems: 27 national foreign policies; the community system centred on economic and trade competences; and the Common Foreign and Security Policy, which is primarily intergovernmental and Member State-led¹¹³. Since its 2016 Global Strategy, the EU has operationalised the Union's security ambitions through: Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) (2017); the European Peace Facility (EPF) (2021); and the Strategic Compass (2022). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was a catalyst: it produced unprecedented sanctions, direct military financing, as well as a sharper focus on European defence and strategic autonomy.

These structural features of the EU's evolving geopolitical identity have had direct and largely underappreciated consequences for its Arctic policy. On the one hand, the post-2022 focus on economic security, CRM and maritime safety has created new entry points for more substantive EU engagement in the Arctic: CRMA, the space and connectivity agenda and subsea infrastructure protection are all Arctic-relevant priorities that now carry real political weight. On the other hand, the reactive and event-driven character of the EU's geopolitical turn has not yet translated into a coherent Arctic strategy. Von der Leyen's 2024-2029 political guidelines are instructive but lacking in key detail: despite the general emphasis on security, the Arctic and the North Atlantic have not been mentioned once¹¹⁴. The geopolitical turn has reinforced the EU's internal incoherence about the Arctic — in other words, adding new security vocabulary to an already crowded umbrella without resolving the fundamental question of what the EU's northern priorities actually are.

A recurring critique of EU Arctic policy is that it lacks a clear account of the EU's actual interests in the region. Rather than a coherent overarching strategy, EU Arctic policy was and has remained an umbrella label grouping together an ever-expanding and largely disconnected set of sectoral activities covering objectives so abstract and vague that they could accommodate almost any EU action with a northern geographical connection¹¹⁵. The 2012 Joint Communication, for example, reduced EU Arctic objectives to three buzzwords, namely 'knowledge, responsibility, engagement'. These functioned as headlines for already ongoing activities rather than as strategic directions. At its core, the EU Arctic policy is 'anything that gets to be implemented' — an overview of the EU's Arctic-relevant actions whose primary function is

¹¹³ J. Peterson and N. Helwig, 'The EU as a Global Actor', in D. Kenealy, J. Peterson, and R. Corbett (eds), *The European Union: How does it work?*, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 194-215.

¹¹⁴ U. von der Leyen, 'Europe's Choice: Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029', European Commission, 18 July 2024.

¹¹⁵ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, 'Exploring Reasons & Remedies for the EU's Incapability to Devise an "Arctic policy": The Quest for Coherence', in L. Heininen et al. (eds), *Arctic Yearbook 2015*, Northern Research Forum, 2015, pp. 432-436.

diplomatic and communicative rather than strategic¹¹⁶. Eventually, the Joint Communications had to (re-) mention every Arctic-relevant EU activity because not mentioning something would become a statement in itself; the result has been an ever-longer laundry list with ever-fewer concrete forward commitments. This structural problem had not been resolved by the 2021 update. The gap between declaratory commitments and operational reality reflects a deeper reluctance (or even capacity) to define what the EU genuinely wants in the Arctic and for what reasons.

The most telling illustration of the EU's internal incoherence is not to be found in its Arctic policy documents but in its other policies. Analysed through the lens of policy integration, EU Arctic policy has so far failed all three meaningful tests: it does not consolidate diverse sectors into a single coherent framework; it does not mainstream Arctic considerations into broader sectoral policymaking in any systematic way; and its 'integration' into existing EU frameworks amounts largely to stating that EU Arctic activities will be consistent with general EU policies that were never designed with the Arctic in mind¹¹⁷. What was argued for in 2015¹¹⁸ and still needed now is a mechanism for communicating Arctic-specific knowledge into general EU decision-making before regulations are adopted, for instance through impact assessments that specifically flag Arctic implications¹¹⁹.

A decade later, that mechanism still does not exist in a systematic form. An exemplifying case of this omission is the current discussion of Andøya Spaceport in northern Norway. Andøya is the first operational orbital spaceport on the European continent and is strategically located for Arctic Earth observation, maritime surveillance and the satellite communication networks underpinning the EU's own Copernicus and Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite (IRIS²) programmes¹²⁰. Space has featured as a component of EU Arctic policy since the first communication of 2008 and every subsequent Joint Communication has underlined the importance of EU space programmes for Arctic monitoring and governance¹²¹. Yet EU rules currently prevent Andøya from serving as a launch site for IRIS², the EU's planned secure satellite constellation. Under the Secure Connectivity Regulation, launches are in principle restricted to EU Member State territory and Norway's deep EEA integration does not override this¹²². The regulation that excluded Andøya was not drafted with the Arctic in mind; the Arctic policy that champions space as a tool of EU engagement was not even consulted when that regulation was finalised. This is precisely the structural mismatch identified a decade ago: EU domestic decisions shape Arctic realities more powerfully than Arctic policy documents do, but the two are rarely connected. The 2026 update must address this, not by adding another layer to the umbrella, but by ensuring that Arctic-relevant regulatory decisions are assessed for their Arctic implications before adoption. A related internal challenge is the administrative burden that EU frameworks impose on Arctic stakeholders. The EU's Arctic policy documents consistently commit to deepening engagement with local and regional actors, such as municipalities, Indigenous Peoples, youth organisations and research institutions. In practice, though, the complexity of EU funding and partnership mechanisms has made meaningful engagement difficult for many Arctic communities. Hence, the remedies proposed remain largely unimplemented (at least to the public

¹¹⁶ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, [The EU's new Arctic Communication: Not-so-integrated, not-so-disappointing?](#), Arctic Centre University of Lapland, May 2016.

¹¹⁷ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, [The EU's new Arctic Communication: Not-so-integrated, not-so-disappointing?](#), Arctic Centre University of Lapland, May 2016.

¹¹⁸ These structural constraints were first systematically identified in the scholarship in the 2014-2019 period; the fact that they require no substantial revision in 2026 is itself a finding — one that the evaluation throughout this study consistently confirms rather than contradicts.

¹¹⁹ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, 'Exploring Reasons & Remedies for the EU's Incapability to Devise an "Arctic policy": The Quest for Coherence', in L. Heininen et al. (eds), Arctic Yearbook 2015, Northern Research Forum, 2015, pp. 432-436.

¹²⁰ A. Raspotnik and J. Schmied-Wirén, 'From Orbit to the Arctic and Beyond: Northern Norway shaping Europe's Space Future', High North News, 20 April 2026.

¹²¹ European Commission and High Representative, [Joint Communication on Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region: progress since 2008 and next steps](#), JOIN(2012) 19 final, 26 June 2012.

¹²² A. Raspotnik and J. Schmied-Wirén, 'From Orbit to the Arctic and Beyond: Northern Norway shaping Europe's Space Future', High North News, 20 April 2026.

eye)¹²³. These remedies include enhanced inter-service coordination within the Commission, durable stakeholder consultation platforms and long-term mechanisms for channelling Arctic knowledge into EU decision-making, for which an inter-service group bringing together policy officers from relevant DGs was established.

A final and frequently underestimated internal challenge is the question of institutional leadership. Within the Commission, Arctic policy has historically been led by the DG for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), with the EEAS coordinating the external dimension. It was already being suggested in 2019 that this set-up be reconsidered to gauge if it is 'still the most appropriate one in light of new Arctic challenges and the broad scope of the EU's Arctic policy', alongside proposals for a stronger, more formalised role for the European Parliament in shaping Arctic priorities¹²⁴. Those recommendations went unimplemented in the 2021 update. This arrangement has reinforced the policy's composite character while limiting its strategic coherence: with no single institutional champion empowered to drive Arctic policy across Commission services, there is a risk that it remains 'a label for various disconnected, mostly already ongoing, activities' rather than a directed strategy¹²⁵. In April 2026, the Commission took a significant step forward by designating Jyrki Katainen — former Finnish Prime Minister and Commission Vice-President — as Special Adviser for EU-Arctic Relations, reporting to the Commissioner for International Partnerships, Sikela¹²⁶. This appointment recognises the need for a higher political profile and cross-service coordination capacity to give EU Arctic policy the level of weight that it warrants. Whether the Special Adviser role translates into a genuinely upgraded and coherent Arctic engagement — rather than a diplomatic gesture — will depend on whether it is backed by the institutional authority and resources to align the regulatory, trade, security and environmental levers that determine the EU's actual impact in the region. Structural remedies remain the same as they were in 2015, namely: enhanced coordination within the Commission; durable stakeholder platforms and systematic Arctic-proofing of EU regulatory decisions. The question is whether there is now the political will to implement them.

6 Recommendations

The EU's Arctic policy documents, especially the (Joint) Communications, have largely remained a collection of ongoing or already planned EU activities seen as relevant for the Arctic, all of which are lacking in ambitious action plans. This makes any evaluation of implementation very difficult, but more importantly, it significantly limits the possibility of making a difference in terms of how the EU operates in sectors and topics important for the Arctic. Maintaining attention on the region as a distinct policy area is valuable, but the EU could do more. The challenge today is no longer to add yet another layer to this already complex policy umbrella for an even more complex geographical domain, but to answer a set of recurring and still unresolved questions for the EU: what does the Arctic mean to the Union; what can realistically be done to shape its future and how does the EU move from simply being in the Arctic to acting effectively within it?

The recommendations that follow are structured around these questions. EU Arctic policy documents should become more future-oriented, establishing priorities and goals that genuinely aim to influence as well as guide EU action rather than retrospectively justify what was already underway — but they must also be formulated with care. Global and Arctic realities are currently undergoing rapid and often unexpected changes, inter alia: Trump's push to acquire Greenland; the breakdown of EU-Russia relations in the Barents region; and the broader unpredictability of great power competition. All create a condition of permanent

¹²³ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, '[Exploring Reasons & Remedies for the EU's Incapability to Devise an "Arctic policy": The Quest for Coherence](#)', in L. Heininen et al. (eds), *Arctic Yearbook 2015*, Northern Research Forum, 2015, pp. 432–436.

¹²⁴ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, '[The EU's Arctic Policy: Between Vision and Reality](#)', College of Europe, August 2019.

¹²⁵ A. Raspotnik and A. Stępień, '[Exploring Reasons & Remedies for the EU's Incapability to Devise an "Arctic policy": The Quest for Coherence](#)', in L. Heininen et al. (eds), *Arctic Yearbook 2015*, Northern Research Forum, 2015, pp. 432–436.

¹²⁶ European Commission, '[The European Commission designates Special Adviser for the EU-Arctic relations](#)', Press release, 13 April 2026.

uncertainty in which rigid policy commitments risk becoming liabilities¹²⁷. Policymakers should avoid creating expectations that will be difficult to meet or that give rise to perceptions of inconsistency, particularly on sensitive issues such as green transition, Arctic securitisation, engagement with Russia and relations with the USA. Overuse of concepts such as sustainability, responsibility and resilience — which command universal agreement precisely because they mean different things to different actors — should be avoided in favour of language that states trade-offs honestly and acknowledges the limits of EU competence.

A more effective Arctic policy also needs to reflect more comprehensively the Arctic's complexity. The EU operates differently across different Arctic spaces, as a key actor in the European Arctic and as a secondary but non-negligible participant in the circumpolar Arctic. Hence, its policy should be calibrated accordingly, with greater focus and resources directed at the European Arctic where EU leverage is greatest and responsibilities most direct. At the same time, the Arctic cannot remain a self-contained policy silo. The fundamental problem is not the umbrella character of EU Arctic policy — an accurate reflection of the EU's multidimensional presence in the region — but that the umbrella currently sits detached from the broader EU policy system. Critical decisions in space, CRM, maritime security, green transition, connectivity and regional cohesion routinely shape Arctic realities without any Arctic lens being applied in their design. What is needed is a systematic mechanism — through impact assessments, inter-service coordination or explicit Arctic-proofing requirements — ensuring that 'the Arctic' is actively considered whenever EU strategies, regulations and funding frameworks relevant to the region are developed. The goal is not a new architecture but one which is better-connected: an Arctic policy that functions as a genuine point of reference within the EU's broader strategic agenda rather than a parallel track.

Finally, the process matters as much as the content. The EU should follow up any general Arctic policy statement with a concrete, forward-looking action plan linked directly to the key ongoing decision-making processes within the EU and timed explicitly to align with negotiation of a new MFF to enhance the cross-cutting policy's budgetary impact. The absence of Council Conclusions endorsing the 2021 Joint Communication's priorities had a measurable detrimental effect on the document's political weight and external perception. The next EU Arctic policy statement must be strongly supported by the Council from the outset to ensure maximum internal coherence and external credibility.

The following recommendations are presented in order of urgency and importance, as assessed by the authors of this paper. For each recommendation, specific actions are proposed and organised from short- to long-term, with the relevant institutions and actors identified for each action.

Recommendation 1: Establish an internal Arctic hub to conduct Arctic impact assessments of EU policies affecting the Arctic

The EU possesses only disjointed internal knowledge and institutional leadership on the Arctic despite rising strategic interest. Its fragmented foreign-policy architecture — Member States, community economic competences and intergovernmental Common Foreign and Security Policy — has so far produced reactive, sectoral Arctic actions rather than a forward-looking, consistent strategy. Moreover, the Arctic policy frameworks usually appear to be disconnected from major general policy processes. EU Arctic policy has consistently failed the integration test, in that Arctic considerations are not mainstreamed into broader EU regulatory and sectoral decision-making. General EU policies — on space, energy, trade, connectivity — shape Arctic realities more powerfully than the Arctic policy itself, without any Arctic lens being applied in their design. Regulatory decisions (such as secure connectivity, environmental, climate and energy policies) are made without assessing specific impacts in and with respect to the Arctic. Complex consultation processes — outside of the Arctic policy formats — fail to amplify the voices of particularly affected

¹²⁷ Interview with European Commission Official, online, 13 May 2026.

stakeholders in the region. Inter-service coordination, durable stakeholder platforms and systematised Arctic-proofing of legislation are still missing.

As geopolitical pressures and Arctic-relevant priorities (CRM, space, maritime security) grow, dedicated Arctic knowledge hubs and empowered leadership are urgently needed to translate rhetoric into coherent policy effectively. The Katainen appointment as Special Adviser in April 2026 is a welcome signal, but a diplomatic gesture without institutional teeth will not resolve a structural problem which has been diagnosed for over a decade. The position is explicitly temporary and internal — established for a few months, primarily to support in some way the preparation of the 2026 Joint Communication. However, it lacks clear institutional linkage to the role of the EU Special Envoy for Arctic Matters within the EEAS, who represents the EU in Arctic forums and discussions. No publicly available rationale or plan exists for a longer-term institutional Special Adviser arrangement. The question, therefore, arises whether the appointment reflects a genuine strategic commitment to upgrading the EU's Arctic institutional architecture, or whether it is primarily a visible response to the rising geopolitical salience of the Arctic — a signal to external audiences that the Commission (and its President) is paying attention, rather than the beginning of a sustained structural effort.

Accordingly, a systematic Arctic-proofing mechanism needs to be embedded in the Commission's Better Regulation framework and anchored in the European Arctic as its primary operational reference point. This should ensure that major EU regulatory initiatives are assessed for their Arctic implications before adoption, alongside a formalised inter-service coordination architecture that gives the Special Adviser — as a permanent, not temporary and part-time position as it is now — real cross-Commission authority to make the European Arctic visible across all relevant EU policy domains. The following actions should be applied:

- **Establish a permanent EU Arctic Knowledge Hub within the Commission** (with a proper mandate, budget and staff) involving key agencies and services such as the JRC and the European Environment Agency. Create a single, resourced unit reporting to the Special Adviser with a clear mandate to collect, synthesise and disseminate interdisciplinary Arctic data (environmental, security, economic, Indigenous knowledge). Timeline: set up within 12 months; staffed and operational within 18 months. Output: public data portal, regular impact briefs for DGs and annual policy recommendations. Lead: European Commission and EU Agencies; Short-term action.
- **Introduce 'Arctic-proofing' for EU regulatory and funding proposals:** call for an Arctic impact assessment (AIA) as part of Commission and European Parliament procedures for any legislation or programme with potential northern implications (such as connectivity, space, mining, fisheries), with particular focus on the European Arctic impacts. Require that legislative proposals, major regulatory initiatives as well as assessments and evaluations of policy implementation in Arctic-relevant sectors (space, energy, maritime, trade, connectivity, CRM) include a dedicated Arctic dimension in their impact assessment, with the Special Adviser's office responsible for quality control, by the start of the MFF 2028-2034 programming cycle. Adopt an AIA requirement in the next Commission work programme; pilot in 6 months; full application within 12-18 months. Output: mandatory AIA annexes / chapters on all relevant regulatory impact assessment, staff working documents and policy implementation evaluations, whenever relevant for the Arctic. Lead: European Commission and the European Parliament; Short-term action.
- **Formalise the European Parliament's existing Arctic engagement into a permanent inter-committee coordination structure.** Currently, Arctic issues are distributed across the European Parliament Committees on Foreign Affairs, Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, Fisheries, International Trade, and Regional Development, as well as Development for Greenland as an Overseas Country and Territory. This fragmentation means that no single European Parliament body has a comprehensive view of the Arctic and the EU's Arctic policy. A formalised inter-committee working group — with a mandate

to produce regular European Parliament Arctic policy reports — would address this without requiring institutional restructuring. This model could also serve as a template for other cross-cutting geographic spaces, where the European Parliament's committee structure similarly struggles to provide coherent oversight, such as the Mediterranean. Lead: European Parliament; Short-term action.

- **Ensure that the impacts and benefits of the EU's general environmental and socioeconomic actions for the Circumpolar North** are discussed and highlighted in non-Arctic-focused EU documents such as policy evaluation reviews, regulatory impact assessments and staff working documents accompanying proposals. Currently, consistent near absence of the Arctic in these documents is a clear shortcoming. Lead: European Commission, EU agencies; Mid-term action.
- In parallel to establishing an EU Arctic Knowledge Hub, particularly if such a proposed initiative is not pursued, **upgrade the Commission's inter-service coordination group on Arctic affairs**. Formalise its mandate, membership and meeting frequency, give it a clear remit to flag regulatory conflicts and opportunities across Commission services and require it to report annually to the Commissioner responsible for Arctic affairs on implementation of the EU Arctic policy action plan. If the EU Arctic Knowledge Hub is created, link up or fully integrate the inter-service group into the Hub. Lead: European Commission and EEAS; Mid-term action.

Recommendation 2: Develop a new northern framework

Formal termination of the ND has left a structural gap in the EU's northern external policy with no concrete successor in sight. What is needed is not a replacement but a reimagination: a new framework reorienting the logic of multi-actor cooperation around the EU's closest northern partners — Norway, Iceland, Greenland, with potentially Canada and the UK — anchored in a permanent institutional structure rather than periodic Nordic or EU-Canada activism. Lessons from the original ND are clear: what worked were not political declarations but concrete sectoral sub-regimes with pooled funding, dedicated institutions and clear deliverables. A successor framework should identify three to five priority action areas — CRM, maritime security, energy transition, civil protection, connectivity and multifaceted community resilience through participation — and build dedicated implementation structures around each with genuine co-ownership from the outset. As Russia's northern regions will remain the EU's closest neighbours in the Arctic, the EU should maintain an open door for limited people-to-people and inter-regional interactions with Russia's northern communities, if and when political conditions allow.

- **Commission to launch a consultative process by the end of 2026** — involving Norway, Iceland, Greenland, Canada, the UK and relevant EU Member States — to define the scope, governance model, together with three to five sectoral priorities for a northern cooperation successor framework, drawing explicitly on the institutional lessons from the ND partnership efforts. Lead: European Commission; Short-term action.
- **Establish a dedicated Northern Cooperation Facility within the MFF 2028-2034** or preserve, strengthen and expand the NPA — a ring-fenced budget line providing pooled funding for joint implementation structures with Norway, Iceland and Greenland. This could be modelled on the ND partnerships, open for future reengagement with Russia and designed from the outset for potential Canadian and UK collaborations. Security and preparedness sub-objectives should also be applied in addition to the existing innovation, entrepreneurship and green transition goals. Lead: European Commission, European Parliament (including MFF negotiations); Mid-term action.

- **Preserve the basic legal architecture for future re-engagement with Russia** (if and when the war in Ukraine ends and / or there are profound political changes in Russia) — ensure that the MFF 2028-2034 programming and the relevant EU external financing instruments retain the legal basis and procedural frameworks for cross-border, people-to-people and inter-regional cooperation with northwest Russia, so that institutional and programmatic capacity can be rebuilt rapidly if political conditions change. Lead: European Commission, European Parliament (including MFF negotiations); Long-term action.
- **Include in this framework mixed and blended investment opportunities** in border regions development and North Calotte cooperation networks to enhance societal resilience and to build capacities for both future re-engagement with Russia on practical cross-border matters (if and when conditions allow) and whole-of-society resilience. Here, the European Parliament could initiate a Northern Parliamentary Partnership to build cross-party political support for a successor northern framework, share best practices on whole-of-society resilience and provide democratic oversight of the framework's implementation once established. This would bring together Members of the European Parliament with Arctic constituencies alongside legislators from the Norwegian Storting, the Icelandic Althing, the Canadian Parliament, the UK Parliament, the Faroe Islands' Løgting, and Greenland's Inatsisartut (with involvement of the West-Nordic Council, the Nordic Council and the three Sámi Parliaments in some capacity). This framework could build on the experience and structure of the ND Parliamentary Forum and the Arctic Region's Conference of Parliamentarians (for instance being organised back-to-back with the latter's meetings), but with a clear focus on EU collaboration frameworks with its Arctic and North Atlantic partners, discussing joint initiatives and regulatory barriers for cooperation. Lead: European Parliament, European Commission; Long-term action.

Recommendation 3: Anchor the Arctic in the new ESS

The EU's 2016 Global Strategy is no longer fit for purpose: assuming that the USA would always be an unconditional European ally is demonstrably no longer valid and hence a new ESS is now under active discussion¹²⁸. Its drafting presents the single most important short-term opportunity to give strategic weight to the Arctic, something that it has never previously held in EU strategic documents. The new security strategy should explicitly name the Arctic as a priority region, define the EU's strategic interests there, namely: economic security; CRM; maritime and subsea infrastructure; domain awareness; as well as rules-based governance of the circumpolar North. Norway, Iceland, Greenland and Canada should be framed as priority partners in a northern sphere of cooperation. Crucially, the new security strategy must also provide the framework for aligning EU and NATO strategic signalling in the Arctic: NATO launched its Arctic Sentry military activity in February 2026 and is increasingly focused on the High North as a theatre of deterrence and defence, while the EU's own security instruments — from the EPF to PESCO and the European Defence Fund — remain largely disconnected from the Arctic security agenda. A new security strategy that speaks clearly to the Arctic would bridge this gap, providing the mandate that EU Arctic policy has lacked since 2008.

- **Ensure Arctic and North Atlantic coverage in the new ESS** — the EEAS and Commission should ensure that the drafting process explicitly addresses the Arctic as part of the EU's strategic neighbourhood, defining northern security interests, naming priority partnerships and providing the overarching political mandate for a strengthened and coherent EU Arctic policy. The Special Adviser for EU-Arctic Relations should be formally involved in the drafting process, with the Arctic explicitly included in the security strategy's sphere of cooperation alongside the other priority neighbourhoods. Lead: EEAS and the European Commission, European Parliament; Short-term action.

¹²⁸ S. Biscop, '[A Grand New European Security Strategy](#)', Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, March 2026; S. Meister et al., '[New Concepts for a New Era of European Security](#)', Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V., February 2026.

- **Update the Strategic Compass to include an Arctic chapter.** Following adoption of the new security strategy, the Strategic Compass, which addressed the Arctic only marginally in 2022, should be revised to include a dedicated ND covering: maritime security; subsea infrastructure protection; space and domain awareness as well as EU-NATO complementarity in the Arctic. This new chapter should establish a formal EU-NATO coordination mechanism specifically for Arctic security, aligned with NATO's Arctic Sentry framework and Joint Force Command Norfolk's North Atlantic mandate. Lead: EEAS and the European Commission; Mid-term action.
- **Issue formal partnership invitations to Norway, Iceland, Greenland and Canada** under the security strategy framework. Using the sphere of cooperation logic, the EU should make explicit, structured offers of deepened security and defence partnership to its four key northern neighbours, covering maritime surveillance, CRM, space and connectivity, civil protection as well as emergency preparedness, with a clear signal that the EU stands behind partners who deepen cooperation with it against any counter-pressure from third parties. Lead: EEAS, European Parliament (within inter-parliamentary relations); Short-to-Mid-Term action.
- **Meaningfully integrate a whole-of-society approach to the European Arctic dimension of the ESS**, in line with current Security Strategy and Preparedness Union Strategy objectives. Consider the local response to threats (including hybrid threats and disinformation) under conditions of a sparse population, remoteness and demographic change. Connect this strategy with regional development approaches that support resilient population structures and infrastructures. Continue discussing Arctic security and preparedness as part of the Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians, expanding to all aspects of the whole-of-society approach and resilience. Lead: European Commission and the EEAS, with the European Parliament and EU / EEA Arctic Member States; Long-term action.

Recommendation 4: Enable more competence on maritime security and hybrid threats linked to Russia

Hybrid threats in Arctic waters have risen since 2014, with Russia-linked activity including fibre-optic cable disruptions, suspicious research-vessel movements and covert equipment aboard civilian ships. Key vulnerabilities include unclear legal norms on submarine-cable protection, thresholds for when incidents constitute armed attacks, rights over foreign naval exercises and contested resource access (such as Svalbard). Arctic-North Atlantic linkages amplify strategic implications, drawing in non-Arctic actors and tying northern security to broader Atlantic partners. The region's sparse populations, harsh geography and proximity to Russia heighten exposure, while hybrid tactics — cyber, disinformation, economic pressure — blur peace-war lines and complicate attribution. Effective response requires: closing legal and normative gaps; vastly improving domain awareness through interoperable surveillance, maritime monitoring and intelligence fusion; improving regional cooperation with Nordic, North Atlantic and NATO partners as well as strengthening EU-backed political, financial and research support for community resilience, digital redundancy and preventive deterrence. Prioritising these measures will reduce vulnerabilities, deter exploitation and stabilise Arctic security dynamics.

- **Enhance deterrence and contingency measures against Russian hybrid activity:** fund joint Nordic-EU rapid response teams (civil-military repair crews, forensic cyber teams, legal-response units), increase targeted sanctions readiness and coordinate pre-planned counter-measures (maritime escorts, denial-of-access measures) to raise costs for malicious actors. Pilot within 9-12 months; operationalise within 18 months. Lead: EEAS, Commission, Member States, with NATO liaison; Short-term action.

- **Strengthen legal norms and rules:** commission an EU-led legal review and draft framework clarifying coastal states' obligations on submarine-cable protection, thresholds for armed attack, lawful limits on foreign exercises and resource exploitation (for example around Svalbard, where Norway and certain EU Member States have diverging opinions on whether the Treaty applies). Fast-track proposals for harmonised rules and mutual-assistance clauses to be tabled in 12-18 months. Lead: Commission (EEAS, DG for Justice and Consumers, DG MARE) with European Parliament and Member States; Mid-term action.
- **Build domain awareness and local resilience:** create an EU Arctic Monitoring & Fusion Cell combining satellite, Automatic Identification System, Signals Intelligence / Open-Source Intelligence and partner intelligence; invest in redundant undersea-cable routes, secure shore-landing hubs and community preparedness grants for digital redundancy and emergency response. Launch within 6-12 months. Lead: Commission (DG for Defence Industry and Space / DG for Communications Networks, Content and Technology), European Defence Agency, European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), EIB; Long-term action.

Recommendation 5: Address the Arctic-space regulatory gap

The EU has declared space to be a pillar of its Arctic policy since 2008, yet its own procurement rules currently prevent Andøya Spaceport from being used for IRIS², simply because Norway is an EEA rather than an EU Member State. Currently, launch from non-EU Member States is permitted only in duly justified exceptional cases. The ongoing EU Space Act negotiation and the IRIS² Secure Connectivity Regulation revision are the immediate vehicles to correct this by extending the space single market framework to EEA partners on equivalent terms. An agreement reached in March 2026 — the Secure Connectivity Agreement — now allows Norway and Iceland to join the EU Government Satellite Communications and IRIS² as participating states¹²⁹. This is a significant step forward, giving both countries access to EU secure connectivity services. However, it did not resolve the launch site problem: under the current IRIS² Secure Connectivity Regulation, launches remain in principle restricted to EU Member State territory, meaning that Andøya Spaceport is still excluded as an eligible launch site despite Norway's formal participation in the programme.

Beyond the fix, the EU should co-fund and back the European Space Agency (ESA) Arctic Space Centre proposed for Tromsø — combining Earth observation, navigation and telecommunications in exactly the domains where Arctic policy, maritime security and domain awareness converge. Correcting this regulation removes a major barrier: once Norway and Canada are treated as trusted space partners rather than third countries, cooperation on maritime surveillance, subsea cable monitoring and Arctic domain awareness follows naturally.

- **Commit EU co-funding to the ESA Arctic Space Centre in Tromsø** — through Horizon Europe, the European Competitiveness Fund or a dedicated instrument — before the joint ESA-Norway working group reports its recommendations at the end of 2026, signalling political investment ahead of the centre's planned 2027 establishment. Lead: European Commission; Short-term action.
- **Amend the IRIS² Secure Connectivity Regulation to recognise Andøya Spaceport** as an eligible European launch site and use the EU Space Act negotiations to extend single market authorisation frameworks to EEA-based space operators on equivalent terms to EU Member State operators by the time the Space Act is at application stage, 2030 at the latest. Lead: European Commission; Mid-term action.

¹²⁹ European Commission, '[EU boosts space cooperation with Norway and Iceland with Secure Connectivity Agreement](#)', News article, 26 March 2026.

- **Open the European Defence Fund's space programmes to Arctic partner participation** — specifically Norway and Canada as a Horizon Europe associate — focusing on maritime domain awareness, subsea infrastructure monitoring, as well as Arctic weather and ice prediction, thereby creating a security-adjacent cooperation track that does not require the EU to assume a formal military mandate. Lead: European Commission, EEAS, with partner countries; Long-term action.

Recommendation 6: Stimulate flagship projects of strategic, economic and local importance across Finland, Norway and Sweden

The EU must urgently integrate Arctic-specific action into its strategic planning to safeguard supply chains, resilience and regional security. The Fennoscandian / Baltic Shield (Finland, Norway and Sweden) together with Greenland hold CRM vital for green transition, digitalisation, AI and strategic autonomy. CRMA and the strategic projects framework provide tools, but investment volatility, legal and social constraints, as well as slow, contested development risk giving rise to local dependency and weakened preparedness. EU action should align resource and energy projects with demographic, infrastructure and community resilience, to include: Arctic-proof regulations and impact assessments; targeted support for transport; secure digital and subsea connectivity; as well as funding for diversified local economies, consultations and benefit-sharing. The North's demonstrated whole-of-society preparedness offers transferable lessons, yet increasing digitalisation, hybrid threats and depopulation demand tailored risk assessments. Prioritising integrated, community-centred Arctic policies will strengthen Europe's raw-materials security, societal resilience and strategic autonomy. EU investment in the European Arctic should also be seen as a key element of the Union's rationale for being involved in Arctic affairs and the basis for its broad acceptance as an Arctic actor.

- **Stimulate the Kiruna-Narvik supply corridor:** fund and fast-track integrated rail, port and multimodal logistics upgrades (EU Trans-European Transport Network co-funding, CRMA strategic project label) to link Kiruna mines to Narvik port for year-round ore export and secure critical minerals supply. Timeline: design + permits 12-18 months; construction phased 3-6 years. Lead: Commission (DG for Mobility and Transport, DG for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (DG GROW)), Member States, Norway, regional authorities, private partners; Mid-term action.
- **Create an EU Arctic Supply-Project Facility:** blended finance instrument (grants, loans, de-risking guarantees) for responsible mining, processing, renewable energy and local value-chain projects across the northern parts of Finland, Sweden and Norway. Introduce more comprehensive de-risking support for projects in Greenland, to include enhancing the certainty of European demand at price levels that allow long-term operations of Greenlandic extraction projects¹³⁰. Tie financing to environmental safeguards, benefit-sharing, workforce development and community resilience plans. Timeline: launch pilot within 12 months. Lead: European Commission (DG GROW), DG for International Partnerships, EIB, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; Mid-term action.
- **Maintain special allocation for the north's sparsely populated areas,** focusing on the role of cohesion policy in building resilience and capacities for whole-of-society preparedness. Continue to consider the impact of remoteness and sparsity in the European Arctic on socio-economic development and needs. An Arctic Committee in the European Parliament could ensure that these perspectives are heard across EU debates. Lead: European Commission, European Parliament, Council (as co-legislators); Mid-term action.

¹³⁰ Interview with Senior Analyst from the Danish Policy Research Community, online, 18 May 2026.

Recommendation 7: Rethink climate change action as a part of the EU's Arctic policy

There is no doubt that climate change is one of the key drivers of changes in the Arctic and hence the EU should promote progress towards climate change objectives via its Arctic policy. This also highlights the Arctic relevance of actions towards European policymakers and the general public thereby serving as a further incentive for ambitious actions. EU policymakers should, though, reflect whether the general / global EU climate action, which is not directly Arctic-focused, should be presented as a pillar / objective of its Arctic policy. In particular, the linkage between the EU's climate action and its Arctic interests is not straightforward. Global warming is a key driver of Arctic change, but the EU, with less than 6 % of global emissions, has a limited impact on the trajectory of Arctic transformation, with the prominent exception of black carbon action. The EU should, therefore:

- **Focus its Arctic policy statements on concrete support for adaptation in the Arctic**, EU-funded Arctic climate research and stronger action on black carbon. Lead: European Commission; Short-term action.
- **Contribute to global climate negotiations** with concrete ideas for highlighting the Arctic within the global climate regime. Lead: European Commission; Mid-term action.
- **Invest in climate preparedness specifically in the European Arctic**, in the whole-of-society, all-hazards and cross-border contexts. Lead: European Commission, European Parliament; Mid-term action.
- **Engage with care in debates and research on climate interventions** that may have an impact on the Arctic and those implemented in the region. Lead: European Commission (with JRC) and the European Environment Agency, European Parliament; Long-term action.

Recommendation 8: Science diplomacy

Science diplomacy is key for the EU's Arctic policy and presence; hence, it should be clearly supported during the 2028-2034 MFF. However, support for Arctic scientific cooperation must deliver concrete results, not just meetings and interactions, no matter how much these help in maintaining the interest and engagement of key partners from Canada, Japan or South Korea. The EU should also address the gap created by decreased US investment in Arctic research and monitoring.

- **Continue to support scientific cooperation with partners in Canada, Japan and South Korea**, for instance by providing resources and promoting collaboration with European institutions. Lead: European Commission; Mid-term action (for MFF 2028-2034).
- The opportunities and momentum created by IPY5 should be fully utilised by including clear Arctic and polar research priorities for the 2028-2034 MFF. Carefully consider how the upcoming International Polar Year (IPY) will be implemented, given very limited cooperation with Russia, to avoid the full division of IPY efforts into two disconnected science collaboration frameworks. This can be mitigated by strategically pursuing multi-national and flexible initiatives involving China, India and other partners, as well as Russia, as the last years have shown that cooperation with Russia is possible within broader, global frameworks. Lead: European Commission, European Parliament (including MFF negotiations and via the Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians); Mid-term action.
- **Concerns over espionage activities within Arctic research** are present and hence the EU should consider how to support the European science community engaged in multinational EU Arctic research projects. Lead: European Commission; Mid-term action.
- **The uptake of Copernicus services in the Arctic is disappointing**, considering the richness of available data and tools, as well as the resources that the EU invested in developing these services. Effective promotion of Copernicus to Arctic partners, based on cases of real and relevant use, is necessary. This

will also add to the EU's image as an Arctic actor that provides concrete contributions for those operating in the region. This promotion should be undertaken through EU research projects, EU delegations' activities in Arctic states, as well as by developing further dedicated Arctic services or dashboards. Canada's participation in Horizon Europe creates additional opportunities for enhancing the awareness and uptake of Copernicus services. Lead: European Commission, EEAS, ESA; Long-term action.

Appendix 1: Summary table of recommendations

	Recommendation	Core actions	Addressees	EU instruments / competences	Indicators / benchmarks
1	Establish an internal Arctic hub	Permanent EU Arctic Knowledge Hub in Commission within two years. AIA for all relevant regulatory proposals. Formalise inter-service coordination group. Permanent integrated Arctic stakeholder platform.	Commission (lead), EEAS, EU Agencies (JRC, European Environmental Agency), European Parliament.	Better Regulation framework; Commission Work Programme; MFF 2028–2034.	Hub operational within 18 months. AIA in ≥ 80 % of relevant proposals by 2030. Inter-service group meets ≥ 4x/year. Stakeholder platform active.
2	Develop a new northern framework	Commission consultative process by end of 2026 (Norway, Iceland, Greenland, Canada, UK). 3–5 sectoral priorities identified. Northern Cooperation Facility in MFF 2028–2034. Legal architecture for Russia re-engagement preserved.	Commission (lead), Council, European Parliament, all EU institutions, Member States, EEA partners.	MFF 2028–2034; Interreg / NPA successor; EU external financing instruments; bilateral agreements.	Consultative process by fourth quarter of 2026. Framework agreed by 2028. Dedicated MFF budget line. ≥ 3 sectoral sub-regimes operational by 2030.
3	Anchor Arctic in new ESS	Arctic explicitly named in new ESS; Special Adviser in drafting. Strategic Compass updated with Arctic chapter and EU–NATO mechanism. Formal partnership invitations to Norway, Iceland, Greenland, Canada; Integrate distinct whole-of-society approach in the European Arctic in the ESS.	EEAS (lead), Commission, European Parliament, Member States.	New ESS; Strategic Compass; EU–NATO Joint Declaration; EPF; PESCO; European Defence Fund.	Arctic clearly integrated in ESS by 2027. Compass Arctic chapter adopted. Partnerships with all 4 partners by 2028. EU–NATO Arctic mechanism established.

	Recommendation	Core actions	Addressees	EU instruments / competences	Indicators / benchmarks
4	Strengthen maritime security and hybrid threat competencies	Nordic–EU rapid response teams funded. EU-led legal review on cable protection and Svalbard. EU Arctic monitoring & fusion cell (satellite, automatic identification system, signals intelligence). Redundant cable routes and community preparedness grants.	EEAS, Commission (DG MARE, DG for Defence Industry and Space, DG for Justice and Consumers, DG for Communications Networks, Content and Technology), European Defence Agency, EMSA, EIB.	European Defence Fund; PESCO; EMSA; EU Maritime Security Strategy; Horizon Europe; EIB.	Response teams piloted within 12 months. Legal framework tabled within 18 months. Fusion cell operational within 2 years.
5	Address the Arctic-space regulatory gap	EU co-funding committed to ESA Arctic Space Centre in Tromsø by end 2026. Amend IRIS ² Regulation: Andøya as eligible launch site. EU Space Act extended to EEA operators. European Defence Fund space programmes open to Norway and Canada.	Commission (lead), EEAS, Norway, Canada.	EU Space Act; IRIS ² Secure Connectivity Regulation; European Competitiveness Fund; European Defence Fund; Horizon Europe; ESA.	Co-funding committed Q4 2026. IRIS ² amended by 2028. Space Act EEA extension by 2030. Andøya IRIS ² eligible by 2030.
6	Stimulate flagship projects in the Fenno-scandian / Greenland Arctic.	Kiruna–Narvik corridor fast-tracked (Trans-European Transport Network, CRMA label). EU Arctic Supply-Project Facility (blended finance). Special MFF allocation for sparsely populated northern areas maintained. Arctic-proofing and benefit-sharing requirements.	Commission (DG GROW, DG for Mobility and Transport, DG for International Partnerships), European Parliament and Council, EIB, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Member States.	Managing authority strategic project label; Trans-European Transport Network; MFF cohesion/ European Regional Development Fund; EIB InvestEU; EU–Greenland partnership.	Facility pilot launched within 12 months. ≥3 CRMA strategic projects funded. Kiruna–Narvik permits complete. Northern areas special allocation in MFF 2028–2034.

	Recommendation	Core actions	Addressees	EU instruments / competences	Indicators / benchmarks
7	Rethink climate change in Arctic policy.	Arctic policy focused on adaptation, black carbon, and Arctic climate research. Targeted Arctic input to global climate negotiations. Climate preparedness investment in European Arctic. Engage carefully on climate interventions research.	Commission (DG CLIMA, DG MARE, JRC, European Environmental Agency), European Parliament, EEAS.	FuelEU Maritime revision; ETS maritime extension; Horizon Europe; UNFCCC mandates; EU Climate Law; Arctic-proofing.	Black carbon in next FuelEU / ETS revision. Arctic adaptation chapter in EU Arctic policy. ≥ 1 concrete Arctic proposal at UNFCCC. MFF 2028–2034 Just Transition Fund Arctic provisions.
8	Strengthen Arctic science diplomacy.	Support scientific cooperation with Canada, Japan, Greenland (MFF 2028–2034). Clear Arctic / polar priorities in 10th Framework Programme. Flexible IPY 2032–33 initiatives including China, India. Promote Copernicus Arctic services to partners. Address espionage concerns.	Commission (DG for Research and Innovation), EEAS, European Parliament, ESA.	Horizon Europe / 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation; Copernicus Arctic Hub; All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance; European Polar Coordination Office; EU research partnerships.	Arctic priorities in 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation by 2028. IPY co-funding committed. Copernicus uptake + 30 % by 2030. All-Atlantic Alliance milestones met. Regular interactions with EU and Japanese science funders and ministers.

Appendix 2: List of interviewees

The authors acknowledge with gratitude the individuals who anonymously shared their insights and perspectives. For record purposes, the date of each interview is noted.

- Interview with EEAS Official, in-person, 2 March 2026
- Interview with Norwegian Foreign Affairs Official, in-person, 6 May 2026
- Interview with Representatives from EU Delegation to Norway, in-person, 8 May 2026
- Interview with European Commission Official, online, 13 May 2026
- Interview with NATO Support and Procurement Agency Representative, online, 13 May 2026
- Interview with Representatives of the Northern Sparsely Populated Regions, online, 13 May 2026
- Interview with EEAS Official, online, 18 May 2026
- Interview with Senior Analyst from the Danish Policy Research Community, online, 18 May 2026
- Interview with Representatives from Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs High North Section, in-person, 19 May 2026

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PE 783.620

EP-EXPO/2023/OP/0001/AFET/LOT2/1/C/4

Print ISBN 978-92-848-3988-9 | doi: 10.2861/8651506 | QA-01-26-220-EN-C

PDF ISBN 978-92-848-3987-2 | doi: 10.2861/6853098 | QA-01-26-220-EN-N