

A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland's Arctic Policy

(Approved by Althingi at the 139th legislative session March 28 2011)

Althingi resolves to entrust the Government, after consultations

prevention, marine scientific research and dispute settlement applicable to all sea areas, including the Arctic region.

5. Strengthening and increasing cooperation with the Faroe Islands and Greenland with the aim of promoting the interests and political position of the three countries.

6. Supporting the rights of indigenous peoples in the Arctic in close cooperation with indigenous organisations and supporting their direct involvement in decisions on regional issues.

7. Building on agreements and promoting cooperation with other States and stakeholders on issues relating to Icelandic interests in the Arctic region.

8. To use all available means to prevent human-induced climate change and its effects in order to improve the wellbeing of Arctic residents and their communities. Iceland will concentrate its efforts fully on ensuring that increased economic activity in the Arctic reellbeing of Ard clima

centres and educational establishments in Iceland working on Arctic issues should be promoted and strengthen in cooperation with other States and international organisations.

12. Increasing consultations and cooperation at the domestic level on Arctic issues to ensure increased knowledge of the importance of the Arctic region, democratic discussion and solidarity on the implementation of the Government's Arctic policy.

Althingi entrusts the Minister for Foreign Affairs with the implementation and development of the policy in cooperation with other relevant ministries, as well institutions and organisation working on Arctic Affairs, and in consultation

As an Arctic State and a founding member of the Arctic Council, Iceland has great interests at stake in the Arctic. Iceland's interests have always been shaped by its geographical position and access to natural resources. Therefore, it is of great importance that consensus is reached across the political spectrum on an Arctic policy which aims at positioning Iceland among those countries that have the greatest influence on future development in the region; safeguarding economic, environmental and security-related interests in the North; and working towards closer cooperation with other nations, international organisations, autonomous regions and stakeholders.

The eight Arctic States, the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, Denmark on behalf of Greenland, Iceland, Finland and Sweden, are mostly concerned with the area and collaborate within the Arctic Council, the main institutional forum for Arctic issues. Other States and alliances, such as China, Japan and the European Union, have also wanted to have influence on current developments, including various cross-national factors such as climate change, possible utilisation of energy and the opening of new shipping routes. NATO is also increasingly directing its attention towards the Arctic region again, even though the alliance has no plans for a military presence. Thus, interest in the region is not limited to the Arctic States themselves, since other States and organisations maintain that they have direct or indirect interests at stake.

All the Arctic States support the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and have pledged to abide by the Convention. Disputes in the field of the law of the sea cannot be ruled out, however, for example over the delimitation of the continental shelf. Several unresolved issues can be mentioned in this context: (1) The United States and Canada are involved in a dispute over the Northwest Passage and a part of the Beaufort Sea which is estimated to hold vast oil deposits. The United States considers the Northwest Passage as an international strait whereas Canada considers the route its internal waters. (2) Denmark and Canada, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other hand, disagree on jurisdiction over the Lomonosov Ridge in the Arctic Ocean. (3) Most nations reject Norway's claim of a 200 nautical miles zone around Svalbard on the basis of conditional sovereignty over the island

coastal States, i.e. the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway and Denmark on behalf of Greenland, have made an attempt to establish a consultative forum for Arctic issues without the participation of Iceland, Finland or Sweden or representatives of indigenous peoples. If consultation by the five States develops into a formal platform for regional issues, it can be asserted that solidarity between the eight Arctic States will be dissolved and the Arctic Council considerably weakened.

The aforementioned issues, i.e. the increased significance of the Arctic in international affairs, utilisation of natural resources, ecological considerations, sovereign rights, international law, disputes over continental shelf rights, security issues, and issues related to the inhabitants of the Arctic region, call for a specific response from Althingi and the Government. While defining Arctic policy issues note should be taken of the following factors:

1. The role of the Arctic Council as the most important forum for international cooperation on Arctic issues needs to be enhanced. Besides the eight Arctic States and Permanent Representatives from six organisations of Arctic indigenous peoples, well over a dozen organisations and six non-Arctic countries have observer status in the Council: The United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, Germany, Poland and Spain. China, Japan, South Korea, Italy and the EU Commission have also applied for permanent observer status in the Arctic Council. This demonstrates increased international interest in the region. Since the Council was founded in 1996 it has served a role in promoting cooperation between countries in the Arctic region, especially in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development. The debate over the utilisation of natural resources and climate change in the Arctic is likely to increase the Arctic Council's political weight. The Council addresses issues related to the environment and communities in the region, such as response to environmental threats, navigation, search and rescue, cultural cooperation, health and the state of animal and plant species. Iceland is among the countries that want to increase the Arctic Council's weight and relevance in decisions on the region, where necessary. An agreement, which is being developed under the auspices of the Arctic Council, on cooperation on search and rescue operations in the Arctic, is a good example. The agreement, which will extend to the whole Arctic region, will be the first legally binding international agreement negotiated in the Arctic Council with full participation by all eight Arctic States. It will be possible to build on the agreement as a precedent for concluding further agreements in other areas.

3. An understanding should be promoted of the fact that the Arctic region both extends to the North Pole and the portion of the North-Atlantic region which has closest ties with the Arctic.

regarding delineation of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles. A continued commitment to that theme of the declaration is a prerequisite for stability and cooperation in the Arctic.

discussed. It is believed that Arctic indigenous peoples are at least 375,000 and divided into

9. General security must be strengthened in the Arctic region and the militarisation of the area prevented. Cooperation must be strengthened and bilateral agreements sought with individual Arctic countries, similar to agreements made with Denmark, Norway and Canada on specific security issues. There is common willingness among the Arctic States to increase cooperation of this kind.

Commerce to promote trade cooperation between businesses and industries in the region is an example. Such consultations can also become a platform for discussion and activities which aim towards greater social and environmental accountability of businesses when it comes to future development of the area. Finally, it is necessary to use the opportunities inherent in environmental and cultural tourism in the Arctic.

11. Education about the Arctic should be promoted, as well as research on the region in the broadest possible sense, such as in the fields of climate change, glacier research, marine biology, international politics and law, security, oil and gas extraction, history and culture, economic and social development, gender equality, health care issues and Arctic shipping.

There is particular need to promote the involvement of Icelandic scholars and institutions in

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