

Policy for the Arctic

The European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party convening in Palermo, Italy on 23-25 November 2011

Notes that:

- The Arctic is one of the regions on earth where the effects of climate change are most obvious. The cover of ice, snow and permafrost is rapidly becoming thinner. During the summer of 2007 and 2011, the ice cover reached an all-time low.
- Although natural fluctuations matter to some extent, scientifically there is no doubt that the shrinking ice cover is an effect of global warming – which in its turn is a result of human influence.
- One of the major priorities for the world now is to prevent and to limit the negative effects of climate change. This calls for multilateral support in adapting to the unavoidable changes, not least in the Arctic.

Recognises that:

- The enormous areas of ocean and land in the Arctic make up a vitally important and vulnerable part of the nature and climate systems of the world, and are of strategic interest to many nations.
- The prediction for the years ahead is that the ice will continue to melt. The melting, in combination with new technology and an increase in commercial interests, will emphasise even further the need for international agreements on how the untouched area now opening up in the Arctic will be used. It is a question of new global waterways for transport, but perhaps even more urgently a question of the rights to the enormous assets of oil, coal, fossil gas and other valuable minerals that will be uncovered by the melting ice in the Arctic.
- Development in the Arctic can create many opportunities but at the same time pose risks of consequences to the environment as well as implications for security policy.

Calls for:

- Development in the Arctic to be handled with responsibility and a view to long-term sustainability, in order to avoid undesirable side-effects;
- Immediate action to be taken in order to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and short-lived climate forcers (SLCF), such as soot, tropospheric ozone and methane;

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- Human influence in the Arctic to be minimised when claims for new ocean transport corridors and development of natural resources are being made;
- The Arctic Ocean to be recognised as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO);
- European countries to act together on the international level to stop sensitive arctic environmental areas from being exploited, for example by creating marine nature reserves in these areas and by achieving a new international binding agreement for the Arctic to regulate developments and environmental aspects;
- Calls upon the international community:
 - o To conclude the agreement on search and rescue and increase such capacity in the Arctic region in order to ensure the appropriate response to possible accidents as the Arctic opens up to marine shipping;
 - o To improve the safety of maritime navigation, in particular through the IMO and its ongoing work, notably in the development of a compulsory polar code.
- All oil tankers using the Arctic Ocean to be fitted with double hulls;
- Environmental impact assessments to be compulsory for all development, such as mining business, shipping and oil exploitation in the Arctic;
- The European Commission, the Arctic Council and all concerned member states to have an effective and broadened dialogue with the indigenous peoples on matters concerning them and to respect the international rights, the culture and livelihood of the indigenous people;
- The Arctic to be a nuclear weapon-free zone.
- The Member States of the EU to work for the strengthening of the Arctic Council (AC) and for the EU through the EU Commission to become an observer in the AC.

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