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Next step for the EU? Reducing its own Arctic Footprint

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It remains unclear what role non-Arctic states will play in Arctic governance following the May 2011 Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting, where Arctic Council Members postponed – for the second time – applications from non-Arctic states to become Permanent Observers at the Arctic Council. Applications from the European Commission, China, Italy and South Korea, in addition to a more recent application from Japan, are subject to new criteria adopted at the 2011 Ministerial Meeting.¹ These new criteria, focused on seven relatively subjective points related to an applicant’s “general suitability,” have fuelled additional debate about who should be included in decisions surrounding the use and protection of Arctic resources. The following brief discusses next steps for the European Union (EU), suggesting that its greatest influence could be gained through implementation of policies and measures to reduce its own Arctic environmental footprint.

Since 2007, when Arctic sea-ice cover reached a record low, the EU has focused increased attention on Arctic issues. Beginning with the international dimension of its 2007 Integrated Maritime Policy, EU policy statements relating to the Arctic have gradually become more defined through the 2008 Commission Communication “The EU and the Arctic Region”, the 2009 European Council “Council Conclusions on Arctic Issues” and most recently, the 2011 European Parliament “Resolution on a Sustainable EU policy for the High North”. The EU has geographic ties to the region through its three Member States – Denmark (Greenland), Finland and Sweden, and two other Arctic states – Iceland and Norway– are members of the European Economic Area. Given its strong ties to the region and increasing concern for Arctic affairs, the EU was understandably shocked when its request for





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Permanent Observer status was deferred in 2009, and again in 2011. The key question for the EU – as well as other non-Arctic states – is how to participate in Arctic decision-making.

Against this background, the European Commission, DG Environment funded a study in 2010 to evaluate the EU’s Arctic environmental footprint and assess the policy options relevant to reducing this footprint. The study – EU Arctic Footprint and Policy Assessment – assesses the EU’s footprint for nine environmental issue areas: 1) biodiversity, 2) chemicals and transboundary pollution, 3) climate change, 4) energy, 5) fisheries, 6) forestry, 7) tourism, 8) transport and 9) Arctic indigenous and local livelihoods. Due to data gaps, calculation of the footprint was not possible for three issue areas: forestry, transport and Arctic indigenous and local livelihoods; the footprint on biodiversity was not calculated since biodiversity loss results from a range of pressures. As shown in Figure 1, below, for the five remaining issue areas, the EU’s footprint was calculated for representative flagship indicators as a percent of the total global impacts. To fully account for EU-driven impacts in the Arctic, consideration was paid to both production and consumption activities that occur within the EU, as well as those that occur within the Arctic and can be attributed to EU demand.

Figure 1: EU Arctic footprint scorecard with flagship indicators.

CATEGORY	FLAGSHIP INDICATOR	EU SHARE
Biodiversity	no flagship indicator	n.a.
Chemicals	PCB-153 emissions from Europe	57%
	Market demand for BFRs in Europe	17%
	EU-27's share of mercury emissions over the Arctic	24%
	EU-27's final demand for products from mercury-intensive Arctic industries	36%
	SO ₂ emissions from the EU-27	42%
	EU-27's final demand for products from SO ₂ -intensive Arctic industries	38%
Climate change	GHG emissions from the EU	16%
	Europe's share of black carbon emissions to the Arctic	59%
Energy	EU-27's final demand for products from the Arctic oil and gas industry	24%
Fisheries	EU-27's share in fish imports from Arctic countries	39%
Forestry	EU-27's final demand for products from the Arctic forestry industry	n.a.
Tourism	Share of EU-27 tourists in the Arctic	27%
Transport	EU share of global shipping traffic in the Arctic	n.a.
Arctic livelihoods	EU impact on employment/income in the Arctic	n.a.

	<20%
	20-35%
	35-50%
	>50%

Source: Sustainable Environment Research Institute (SERI), 2010.

At the same time, an assessment of existing EU policies related to each of the nine issue areas was conducted to develop a set of policy options aimed at reducing the environmental impacts from EU driven production and consumption activities. Results point to several high-impact policy options for reducing the EU’s environmental footprint, especially related to the issue areas as follows:

- **Chemicals and transboundary pollution.** Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and heavy metals travel to the Arctic from outside the region via prevailing winds, ocean currents and bio-transport. Although some POPs are declining due to bans and other restrictions (e.g. PCBs and DDTs), new and potential POPs are still in use in the EU, and legacy POPs continue to be emitted from soil, landfill sites, and POP-containing products.² In addition, although mercury emissions have substantially decreased in North America and Western Europe, global mercury emissions may be increasing.³ While the EU should target different contaminants with specific policies, generally, the EU can help decrease its footprint by increasing coordination among EU regulatory frameworks (e.g. REACH) and Arctic Council working groups, as well as leading efforts to develop an international mercury agreement.
- **Climate change.** The Arctic is frequently referred to as the ‘canary in the coal mine’ with respect to global climate change. Observed temperature increases are approximately double those seen in the rest of the world, with record temperature increases in some places 5°C, with an average warming of 1-2°C across the Arctic region.⁴ The EU has shown international leadership in climate change negotiations, and the EU is more than halfway toward meeting its 2020 GHG emissions target.⁵ The steady decline in emissions from the EU-27 since 2003 is due primarily to decreasing final energy demand from households.⁶ There is recognition that more is needed to reduce emissions from the transport sector. The EU can significantly reduce its Arctic footprint through further reduction of black carbon emissions, for example, by requiring Diesel Particulate Filters for passenger and commercial vehicles.
- **Energy.** The oft-cited 2008 US Geological Survey (USGS) study estimates that there are approximately 400 billion barrels of oil equivalent reserves in the Arctic, 84% of which are located offshore.⁷ The EU has a well-established energy-trade relationship with Russia and Norway, and – despite considerable environmental risks – Arctic resources are increasingly more attractive to the EU (and others) due the relative safety of the region and advances in technology. As called for in the 2010 Communication, “Facing the challenge of the safety of offshore oil and gas activities” the EU should support binding international rules building on the guidelines of the Arctic Council.⁸ In addition, continued cooperation with Russia, e.g. through the Northern Dimension and Barents Euro-Arctic Council is critical to ensure and support sustainable development of Russia’s natural resources.
- **Fisheries.** Arctic fisheries only provide 4% of the global catch, however, this could change as warming ocean temperatures may encourage fish and other marine species to shift northward.⁹ Although ocean acidification and potential competition from invasive species could also influence Arctic fisheries, there is a window of opportunity for the international community to implement regulations to protect future fisheries, which are already threatened by Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing (e.g. for Atlantic cod and Alaska Pollock).¹⁰ Perhaps the greatest influence the EU can have in reducing its footprint on Arctic fisheries is by enforcing sustainability standards on fish imports and continuing to combat IUU fisheries, and by ratifying the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate IUU Fishing (FAO PSM Agreement).
- **Tourism.** Arctic tourism is seeing an increase in popularity as the perceived “expiration date” of Arctic landscapes and wildlife drives demand for tourism services. The cruise ship industry is the fastest growing sector. For example, annual cruise passengers to Svalbard, Norway increased from about 20,000 in 2000 to nearly 30,000 in 2008, while its cruise ship landing sites increased by about one third in that time.¹¹ The number of cruise ships in Canada doubled from 2005 to 2006, and Alaska cruise visitor volume rose to more than 1 million in 2007.¹² The EU, as well as the tourism industry, emphasise the need for “sustainable tourism”. Popularity for ecotourism could support development of an Arctic Tourism Association similar to the International Arctic Tourism Association (IATA) and could continue to help the EU identify and support stronger links between tourism and habitat conservation.

As the EU continues to evaluate its role in Arctic affairs – implementing relevant policy at the Member State and EU levels – it is important that the eight Arctic nations and indigenous peoples organisations take note of EU interests and actions relevant to the region. Even if they are denied a seat at the Arctic Council, it is clear that the EU and other non-Arctic states will continue to be active consumers and producers of Arctic resources and thereby have a significant impact on the region. If interested parties are denied a voice, opportunities to strengthen cooperation and develop early coordination of Arctic natural resource protection and sustainable development could be missed.

¹ Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) Report to Ministers, Nuuk, Greenland, May 2011. Available online at: <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about/documents/category/20-main-documents-from-nuuk#> (viewed 7 November 2011).

² Summary based on Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) (1997): Arctic pollution issues. A state of the Arctic environment report. Oslo; Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) (2002): Persistent Organic Pollutants in the Arctic. Oslo.; Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) (2009): Arctic pollution 2009. Oslo.

³ Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) (2005): AMAP Assessment 2002: Heavy metals in the Arctic. Oslo.

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Core Writing Team, Pachauri, R.K., Reisinger, A. (Eds.) (2007a): Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report, Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Geneva, Switzerland. Available at: http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_synthesis_report.htm (viewed 7 November 2011).

⁵ European Commission: Environment (2010b): Effort Sharing Decision. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/effort_sharing/index.htm (viewed 7 November 2011).

⁶ European Environmental Agency (EEA) (2010b): GHG trends and projections in the EU-27. Available at: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/climate/ghg-country-profiles/tp-report-country-profiles/eu-27-greenhouse-gas-profile-summary-1990-2020.pdf> (viewed 7 November 2011).

⁷ US Geological Survey (2008): Circum-Arctic resource appraisal: Estimates of undiscovered oil and gas north of the Arctic Circle. Available at: <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3049/> (viewed 7 November 2011).

⁸ European Commission (2010): Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Facing the challenge of the safety of offshore oil and gas activities. COM(2010) 560.

⁹ Rudloff, B. (2010a): The Case of Fisheries. Paper presented at the GeoNor Stakeholder Seminar, The EU and the Arctic: Stocktaking and Interests. 27 May 2010.

¹⁰ Burnett, M., Dronova, N., Esmark, M., Nelson, S., Rønning, A. & Spiridonov, V. (2008): Illegal fishing in Arctic waters. WWF International Arctic Programme, Oslo.

¹¹ Geitz, M. (2009): Arctic Conservation – Where Do We Go From Here and How Fast Do We Get There? in The Circle 2009, 2:22-25. WWF International Arctic Programme.

¹² Snyder, J. (2007): Tourism in the Arctic: Past, Present and Future. Coastal Response Research Center, available at: http://www.crrc.unh.edu/workshops/arctic_spill_summit/presentations/snyder.pdf (viewed 7 November 2011).