

Norway's input to the update of EU's Arctic policy

Norway welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the update of EU's Arctic policy.

Norway highly recommends an emphasis on the following key points:

- *Partnerships as a main approach in the EU Arctic policy. Cooperation should be calibrated to function seamlessly under all conditions, including crisis situations, and should be underpinned by close economic, research, and political collaboration. Synergies with existing frameworks for regional cooperation should be sought, and bilateral partnerships should both be supported by and leveraged to support EU Policy.*
- *Acknowledge the significant potential for strengthened Norway–Europe cooperation in the Arctic, grounded in shared interests in stability, sustainable development, and resilient infrastructure.*
- *Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of Arctic states, and of international law, including UNCLOS, should be the foundation for all activities in the Arctic. Strong support for multilateral cooperation, including the Arctic Council as the leading multilateral forum for Arctic affairs.*
- *Recognition of the importance of a science- and knowledge-based approach to policymaking, engagement and cooperation with partners.*
- *Particular potential for strengthened cooperation on issues such as situational awareness, communications, space, search and rescue, maritime presence and maritime support infrastructure, research facilities and communities, infrastructure vital to military mobility in the Nordic area.*

1. Background – Norway as an Arctic nation

Norway is one of eight Arctic countries, one of five Arctic coastal states to the central Arctic Ocean and a leading polar nation. Our core national interests are defined by our geography and our immediate neighbourhood. Russia's brutal war against Ukraine and their hostile attitude towards western countries and neighbours, has not only a profound impact on European security, but also on people and communities in the north. Russia's vast nuclear arsenal on the Kola peninsula is in close proximity to our border. This makes Norway's Arctic - the High North - an area of the highest strategic importance to Norway.

Contrary to many other parts of the circumpolar Arctic, the northern parts of our country are modern and developed, home to almost 10% of Norway's population. It is a central hub for Arctic science, knowledge- and educational institutions, key industries for critical resources such as seafood, energy (including oil, gas, wind, and hydropower) and minerals, with an emphasis on sustainable and responsible development. It is in Norway's national interest to continue to develop thriving and resilient communities in the north, to make use of these resources. Many industries, resources, and infrastructure in the region are also essential to the resilience of European value chains.

1.1 Norway's High North strategy

Deriving from the overarching National Security Strategy of May 2025, and the White Paper on Total Preparedness (2025), the Norwegian Government's High North strategy of August 2025 underlines the importance of vibrant and resilient local communities in Northern Norway for safeguarding national security and preparedness. Strong societies, sustainable economic activity and sound governance in the north form the foundation for Norway's ability to maintain stability, ensure national control and promote our security interests in a rapidly changing Arctic.

The High North strategy is based on Norway's fundamental security interests: a free and independent Norway, a robust democracy, a safe society with high level of trust, an open and adaptable economy, allied solidarity and unity in Europe, and a world that seeks solutions based on international law and a rules-based order.

The strategy is also underpinned by Norway's climate policy, indigenous policy and commitment to sustainable development in the Arctic. Norway has a statutory target of becoming a low-emission society by 2050. Climate risk and the need for adaptation are integral considerations in all planning processes. The strategy also takes into account the importance of Sami culture, traditional livelihoods and knowledge, which form a valuable part of Norway's historical heritage and are vital to ensuring that development in the Arctic is both sustainable and inclusive.

A fundamental part of Norway's High North policy is that all developments and activities in the Arctic must be done in line with international law and adhere to international rules and norms. The Arctic is well-regulated and is not a legal vacuum. There are no major remaining maritime disputes. The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be conducted. In addition, IMO regulations are applicable.

International and multilateral cooperation remains a cornerstone of Norway's policy. The Arctic Council is the preeminent international forum for cooperation in the Arctic, and maintaining the Council with the eight member states, six Permanent Participants and observers are in Norway's fundamental interests. The strategy also highlights the potential for strengthened Norway–Europe cooperation in the Arctic, grounded in shared interests in stability, sustainable development, and resilient infrastructure.

2. Recommendations

Norwegian and European security concerns in the Arctic are closely aligned and highly interconnected. The EU Arctic policy could explore the benefits of a closer partnership in several areas, including where Norway can make significant contributions.

2.1. Security in the Arctic

European security is upended by Russia's brutal war of aggression in Ukraine, which is also impacting the Arctic in numerous ways. At the same time, melting sea ice and rising temperatures have dramatic consequences for life and nature in the Arctic. It makes parts of the Arctic more accessible, expanding the scope of civilian and military activity. The geopolitical situation and climate change are driving the substantial and growing global interest for the Arctic.

The security situation in the Arctic is currently stable, and it is a key Norwegian priority to uphold stability and predictability in the region. Norway's comprehensive situational awareness of the region

is a valuable contribution to NATO. We welcome NATO allies' increased focus on - and knowledge about - the Arctic and the threat from Russia. We manage our relations with Russia with firmness and predictability. Maintaining credible deterrence to ensure security and stability, while avoiding misunderstandings and unintended escalation, is of vital interest to Norway – and to Europe. We work to build resilience against Russian attempts to destabilize our societies, a concern we share with EU member states.

The High North is of vital strategic importance to Russia. A majority of Russia's sea-based nuclear deterrent is located on the Kola peninsula. The modernization of Russia's Northern Fleet continues, particularly within the submarine force and through the introduction of advanced strike weapons. Russia continues with substantial weapons testing in the High North to improve existing and develop new weapon systems.

The High North, as the rest of Europe, is subject to Russian espionage and influence operations. A special concern is the continued Russian efforts to develop its military capability to attack Western critical deep-sea infrastructure, such as gas pipelines or communication cables.

Norwegian ocean areas are of great significance for civilian traffic as well as for security of supply and military movements. They connect Northern Europe with the North Atlantic and is also Russia's gateway to the North Atlantic. In the current geopolitical landscape, the extensive Russian military capabilities in the High North represent a direct threat to the US and Europe. Furthermore, European supply security is significantly affected by the vulnerability of vital infrastructure (particularly for energy) and depends to some extent on Arctic transport lanes and secure access to Arctic resources.

The Arctic is important also for Russian economic ambitions, especially linked to transport through the Northeast Passage. China has long term interests in Arctic. Increased Sino-Russian collaboration in the Arctic is closely monitored by Norway. Although Russia and China do not necessarily have overlapping interests in the region, the collaboration can have implications for Norwegian and European interests. Norway pursues a restrictive policy regarding Chinese activity in the Arctic.

- The developments in the Arctic have implications for Europe which require engagement and understanding through a comprehensive approach that includes up-to-date situational awareness, presence, and knowledge.
- Faced with increased activity in the Arctic by other powers, Europe should increase its engagement and capacity to act on matters related to the Arctic. The resources the EU can bring to bear in the Arctic are limited by geography. Situational awareness, knowledge and operational capacity depend to a large extent on land-based infrastructure and maritime assets that often require presence. We believe the most effective way to address this is to leverage the resources of regional partners through the closest possible collaboration.
- An emphasis on partnership should consequently be a main approach of the strategy. Co-operation should be calibrated to function seamlessly under all conditions, including crisis situations, and should be underpinned by close economic, research- and political collaboration. Synergies with existing regional co-operation should be sought.
- Norway seeks cooperation, predictability, and stability in the Arctic. Norwegian and European security concerns in the Arctic are closely aligned and highly interconnected. The strategy could explore the benefits of a partnership approach in a number of areas, where the following Norwegian assets might be considered: Situational awareness, communications, space, search and rescue, maritime presence and maritime support infrastructure, research facilities and communities, infrastructure vital to military mobility in the Nordic area.

- We look forward to the regular bilateral Arctic dialogue between Norway and the EU, as agreed between Foreign Minister Barth Eide and HRVP Kallas in February 2026, supplementing a number of other related processes. The updated policy should strongly emphasise that the Arctic is well-regulated and that all activities must be in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS. The importance of multilateral cooperation in the Arctic should be highlighted.
- Active cooperation between Norway and EU on countering hybrid threats in the Arctic is an area of particular importance. Norway is ready to engage in co-operation on relevant measures, including in the scope of the EU Preparedness Union Strategy and the Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030.

2.2. Infrastructure and mobility

In the region near Norway's border with Russia, steps are taken to improve infrastructure, surveillance and mobility in collaboration with Sweden and Finland. To handle crisis and threats to the Arctic, effective transport through the northern EEA EFTA States will play a key role. EU transport policy, including the Trans-European Network for Transport, is part of the EEA Agreement. The importance of military transport through Norway is accentuated by Sweden and Finland's membership in NATO. While the cross-border dimension of military mobility requires a coordinated European-wide approach, regional cooperation in the North has become even more important.

- We recommend that Norway be enabled to participate, as fully and equally as possible, alongside EU Member States in EU systems for military mobility, to ensure effective cooperation and coordinated action.

2.3. Maritime activity and security

About 80% of all Arctic shipping pass through in Norwegian waters. Under the agreed division of responsibilities among the Arctic states Norway has responsibility for search and rescue operations across northern sea areas up to the North Pole. The continued increase in shipping activity in the Arctic constitutes a risk to the vulnerable Arctic environment and must be met by relevant measures to reduce the risk of accidents and pollution. The Norwegian government continues to work both nationally and internationally to ensure that only ships built and equipped for operations in polar areas, sail there. Appropriate training and knowledge about Arctic conditions are essential to ensure safe and environmentally sustainable shipping and for reducing the risk of accidents. Increased maritime traffic also requires strengthened cooperation on improving maritime safety and reducing environmental impact and risk, both within the IMO and regional forums such as the Arctic Council.

The number of vessels in the Russian shadow fleet is also increasing in the Arctic, which is of concern. Joint efforts to tackle the shadow fleet is important to put pressure on the Russian economy and support Ukraine. Norway has a strong interest in upholding UNCLOS both as a flag state and as a coastal state.

Russian and Chinese ambitions to transport more goods through the Northeast Passage contribute to international attention to the potential usage of this route between Europe and Asia. With respect to the development of the Northeast Passage, any discussions will need to consider the political, legal, economic and environmental aspects. There is much hype about future potential. The general view in the Norwegian shipping industry is that the Northeast Passage is not a viable commercial route between Europe and Asia in the near future. Challenging climatic conditions, unpredictability, high

costs, the fact that much of the route falls under Russian jurisdiction and the general geopolitical situation make it unattractive.

- We recommend that the EU strengthen cooperation with Norway on joint preparedness and response efforts in the Arctic, building on Norway's well-functioning and highly trusted rescue service.
- We recommend that the EU take a leading role in reducing black carbon emissions by strengthening relevant requirements under the IMO framework (MARPOL Annex VI).
- We recommend that the EU work to ensure that the IMO establishes a clear definition of polar fuels, addressing both limits on black carbon emissions and the risks of environmental harm from acute releases.
- We recommend that the EU promote the introduction of a requirement that any oil used as fuel in polar waters must comply with these strengthened standards.
- We recommend that the EU contributes to strengthened maritime surveillance in the Arctic, including as an active contributor to emergency preparedness exercises in the Arctic, in close cooperation with Arctic states and partners.
- We encourage that the updated policy provides a realistic description of the Northeast Passage as a potential shipping route between Europe and Asia.
- Continue close dialogue on issues related to Russian shadow fleet, including potential environmental risks in the Arctic.

2.4. Energy security and natural resources in the Arctic

Norway is the largest producer and only net exporter of significance of oil and gas to Europe. Oil and gas production from the Norwegian Continental Shelf contributes significantly to Europe's energy security and covers about 30 per cent of the EU's and the UK gas demand. Our CO₂ emissions per unit produced are among the lowest in the world.

Due to the warmer waters of the Gulf Stream, the conditions for oil and gas activity in the Barents Sea are benign and are comparable to those further south on the Norwegian Continental Shelf. Norway has significant untapped oil and gas resources, and almost two thirds of our undiscovered petroleum resources are expected to be located in the Arctic part of the Norwegian Continental Shelf.

Continued responsible exploration and production on the Norwegian Continental Shelf will allow Norway to remain a reliable supplier to Europe. Restrictions on Norwegian Arctic oil and gas production or imports would undermine this role. Such restrictions – i.e. in the form of an EU moratorium - would not affect Norway's sovereign rights under UNCLOS to explore and exploit resources on its continental shelf.

Norway's Integrated Ocean Management Plans clarify an overall framework and measures for conservation and sustainable use of Norway's marine areas. This also includes a framework for petroleum activities in specific geographic areas.

- Through further responsible exploration, development and production on the Norwegian Continental Shelf, including in the High North, Norway can continue to deliver oil and gas to Europe with high reliability.

2.5. Space research and infrastructure

Satellite-based infrastructure is essential for communication, surveillance, and PNT (positioning, navigation, timing) in the Arctic due to the vast areas, sparse population, and harsh climate. Ground based infrastructure located in the Arctic plays or will play a pivotal role in operating and maintaining the space segment. Norwegian current and planned space related assets in the Arctic that are or could be especially useful for Europe, include:

- Infrastructure to receive and distribute data, perform satellite control, fundamental geodetic data, as well as observation data related to space surveillance and tracking.
 - Andøya Spaceport for efficient launch operations.
 - The next generation broadband communication for the Arctic.
 - Norwegian ocean surveillance capacities could increase the usefulness and relevance of the proposed Earth Observation Governmental Service in the Arctic.
- We recommend that the EU and Norway deepen their already close partnership in the space domain, as this will strengthen Europe's security, resilience, and competitiveness.

2.6. Strong, vibrant and resilient societies

Vibrant communities and activity in Northern Norway are crucial for the security, preparedness and resilience of both Norway and Europe. Achieving this requires strengthened cross-border cooperation and coherent policy efforts with Nordic EU-members, supported by the EU.

Norway values being part of the Interreg programmes in the European Arctic on an equal basis with the EU member states. We seek to deepen Nordic cooperation, continue active participation in EU Interreg programmes, and explore new cross border initiatives based on local and regional needs, delivering synergies and contributing to resolving joint challenges.

Focus on emergency preparedness, civilian infrastructure, and crisis management in the Arctic must continue, so that robust solutions are in place in the event of a crisis or conflict. At the same time, we must keep a functional division of labour in which NATO is responsible for hard security and military defence.

Norway recognizes and supports the crucial role EU plays by regulating, financing, and standardizing infrastructure that supports both green value creation and preparedness in crises and war.

Reliable electronic communications and efficient power systems with sufficient security of supply and grid capacity, as well as accessible transport systems are vital for safety, business activity, and vibrant communities. Cooperation between transport and defence across borders must be further strengthened.

- Prosperous and resilient communities in the Arctic are key factors for Norwegian, and European, security. Norway welcomes EU continued engagement in bolstering regional development in Arctic communities, including initiatives aimed at the bolstering opportunities for younger generations.
- We encourage the EU to strengthen Interreg and other border crossing programmes, and to continue to support and further develop the already existing «Interreg Arctic cooperation».

- Norway encourages that the EU's Arctic policy highlights the importance of civilian (transport) infrastructure as a basis for value creation, settlement, and emergency preparedness in the north.
- The updated policy should call for coordinated and increased investment in cross-border transport and infrastructure from both Norway and the EU.

2.7. Indigenous people and National Minorities

The Sami, as an Indigenous People, have a right to self-determination in Norway. This right is exercised primarily through the Sami parliament (the Sámediggi) the representative, directly elected, political body for the Sami. The Sami must be ensured real and effective participation in matters that affect them, as stated in the ILO Convention no. 169. Sámi reindeer husbandry is an important economic, social and cultural element in the northern area, and is the basis for livelihoods in marginal areas.

- We recommend the EU Arctic policy to ensure involvement of the Sami Parliaments in measures with potential impact on Sami interests and to acknowledge the presence and rights of national minorities such as Kven/Norwegian Finns and indigenous people such as the Sami living in the northern regions.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities obliges states to ensure their cultural, linguistic, and political participation rights. The current reference to FPIC in the 2021 EU Arctic policy does not fully reflect the formulation in UNDRIP Article 19.

- We recommend aligning the EU Arctic policy with international standards by using the wording: “in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent”, and making an explicit reference to UNDRIP Article 19.

2.8. Climate change and environmental aspects

The Arctic environment is in a state of profound transition due to climate change. The region is already experiencing long-term changes, requiring governments, communities and industries to focus both on climate change mitigation and adaptation. The changes in the Arctic impact both local ecosystems and the global climate system. While the effects of climate change are pronounced in the Arctic, their causes are often linked to activities taking place outside the region. This underlines the importance of raising awareness of Arctic climate change on a global level, and to integrate Arctic issues in global frameworks and conventions. This calls for a deepening of our understanding of the multiple risks and societal implications of climate-related changes and associated extreme weather events.

Better policy alignment and consistency across relevant management bodies, agreements and fora could strengthen conservation and sustainable use in the Arctic. This could also increase the overall efficiency of conservation measures to reach global targets such as the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and ensure that the measures are adapted to the new geopolitical context. In turn, this could also increase predictability and stability for states and stakeholders active in the Arctic.

Cooperation across regional bodies should be strengthened. This includes closer links between Northeast Atlantic organizations—such as OSPAR, NEAFC, ICES and CAOFA—and the Arctic Council’s

knowledge building work through the PAME, CAFF, AMAP, and SDWG working groups. Enhancing synergies among these fora can help scale Arctic adapted, sustainable solutions and support global goals, including SDG 14.

The Arctic marine areas are undergoing rapid change due to climate change, which poses a threat to both species and ecosystems and enables new and increased activity that can exacerbate pressure on the environment. International cooperation and ecosystem-based marine management are therefore prerequisites for conservation and sustainable use of Arctic marine areas and resources as a basis for livelihoods and value creation.

More specifically, we underscore the value of the Arctic Council working groups' efforts to build a shared knowledge base for Ecosystem-Based Management and to develop a planning tool for area-based conservation in the high Arctic. Synergies with the OSPAR Arctic Task Group's work are crucial for a coordinated approach in the context of BBNJ and the Central Arctic Ocean.

- We recommend continued and strengthened cooperation between Norway and the EU on monitoring, research, and assessments to deepen the understanding of climate and security related risks in the Arctic.
- We encourage active participation by EU member states and the European Commission in such work under the Arctic Council and other relevant international forums.
- We recommend improving policy alignment and ensuring consistency across relevant management bodies, agreements, and fora to strengthen conservation and the sustainable use of Arctic ecosystems.
- We recommend strengthening cooperation across Northeast Atlantic organizations and the Arctic Council knowledge building work.
- We recommend that the EU's updated Arctic policy support coordination across the Arctic Council and organizations with a mandate to implement area-based measures in the Arctic, such as OSPAR, NEAFC, IMO and CAOFA, ensuring that future proposals rest on strong scientific foundations and enjoy broad backing from Arctic states and the EU.

2.9. International Arctic Research Cooperation

Continued climate and environmental research on issues pertaining to the Arctic is critical. Research also strengthens knowledge of strategic conditions in the Arctic and supports both existing and emerging resource-based industries. Norway welcomes increased international research cooperation, and Norwegian institutions have comprehensive cooperation with partners in Europe, and beyond. The geopolitical situation has affected the work of higher education institutions and research institutes. Norway has taken steps to increase awareness of the new situation in this sector and has developed national guidelines for responsible international cooperation in the research and education sector.

The Arctic must be seen as a whole. This is why the research going on within the Arctic Council must be preserved and strengthened. The professional and financial contributions to the Arctic Council, its working groups and project level, from the EU and EU countries that are observers are highly valued.

The fifth International Polar Year (2032-33) is an important arena for international cooperation on research in both polar regions. Norway welcomes and encourages international cooperate, particularly with EU member states and other countries based on shared values and that recognize the importance of a rules-based order. The Norwegian led *Arctic Ocean 2050* ten-year research program has been recognized as a flag ship program under the IPY5.

Norway will continue to invest in ocean observation in the Arctic and to participate actively in all relevant European ocean observation infrastructures. Ocean observation underpins a wide range of applications, including climate monitoring, ecosystem-based management, maritime safety, and sustainable development of ocean-based industries.

The EU's Arctic policy should help strengthen knowledge development through research in relevant areas. Harsh climatic conditions limit agricultural food production in the north, creating a need for research on variety development, cultivation systems, and climate adaptation. These priorities should align with the new EU research and innovation framework, enabling Norwegian research and development communities and international partners to develop technologies that increase food production and preparedness, thereby reinforcing the region's overall resilience and defense.

- We encourage the EU to strengthen cooperation also with likeminded Arctic countries outside the EU.
- We encourage European partner institutions to take part in and contribute to *the Arctic Ocean 2050* program.
- We encourage continued and enhanced investment in ocean observation infrastructures in the Arctic and of addressing the topic in the forthcoming EU Ocean Observation Initiative.
- We encourage the EU to ensure that calls under Framework Program 10 (FP10) reflect Arctic needs and conditions – such as maintain and expand the Arctic focus within the EU Mission Ocean and Waters, prioritize Arctic marine research when supporting university and research networks in the region, and strengthen knowledge development on food security and preparedness.