



## SUMMARY REPORT

# Climate Change and the Arctic

## *The implications of the Paris Agreement for the Arctic Region*

19 April 2016

European Parliament, Brussels

Policy-makers, representatives from the Arctic regions, civil society, and stakeholders were brought together by MEP Christel Schaldemose and MEP Anneli Jäätteenmäki in the European Parliament to discuss climate change in the Arctic and assess the implications of the Paris Agreement for the Arctic, including the role of indigenous communities.

**Anneli Jäätteenmäki MEP** welcomed the participants by highlighting that there is a clear difference in the winters experienced as they are today much shorter compared to the past. It was also said that in some parts of Finland winter is not even noticeable. It was underlined that climate change is an urgent matter, particularly in the Arctic as it is more vulnerable to its effects. It was stressed that climate change is a common concern with some common policies but implementation is thus far not adequate. It was mentioned that Arctic issues are in the shadow at EU level due to many other pressing issues such as the refugee crisis. It was said that even though climate change is acknowledged it must be prioritised higher calling for more resources to be provided to tackle climate change in the Arctic.

**Christel Schaldemose MEP and Chair of the “Arctic” working group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development”** reiterated that the Arctic is vulnerable to climate change and that more needs to be understood concerning the impacts in order to take further action. It was said that a higher level of attention is needed on the Arctic. The upcoming Arctic Strategy was mentioned and it was said that it is hoped that it will provide some good indications on how to act as a Union and a global partner on these matters.

**Anne Bergenfelt, Third country relations officer, DG Climate Action, European Commission** reiterated that climate change and the Arctic are closely interlinked also underlining that the effects seen in the Arctic show that climate change is real. It was said that climate change remains high on the agenda mentioning the success of the Paris Agreement and the need to focus on its implementation. It was said that part of the success is due to the groundwork, which was conducted prior to Paris in terms of the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions and also because NGOs, the private sector, and local and regional authorities have pledged further ambition. The importance of the High-Level Coalition was also raised. It was emphasised that the ambition has been set and that through implementation emissions will be cut emissions and the impacts reduced. It was also pointed out that the climate change narrative has transitioned into a green growth issue, which our economies should be built on. Further, this narrative is developing to include security, which was pointed out as a key issue for future debate. The work being conducted by the US in Alaska was also acknowledged. The Arctic Communication was mentioned highlighting that it will showcase tools that are available in the EU to ensure best practices as well as underline the



importance of climate change focusing on the need to speak in an open and clear voice. It was concluded by stating that the Paris Agreement has created a momentum for focus on the Arctic and the Communication will add further focus to the Arctic and push for cooperation among all actors.

**Carole Martinez, Program Coordinator, IUCN Marine and Polar Program** highlighted some examples of adaptation actions in the Arctic to provide further inspiration and implementation to the Paris Agreement. It was stressed that it is essential to address the key marine components of any climate change strategy in order to ensure adaptation and resilience. It was pointed out that the challenge is not just about rising sea temperatures and melting ice caps, but about developing a comprehensive ecosystem-based approach. It was said it is pivotal to integrate social and cultural dimensions. The PRISINA project within the BEST Initiative was mentioned, which aims to protect biodiversity and create multiple benefits for local communities in Greenland. It was underlined that people in the Arctic are facing huge challenges and successful adaptation to climate change and sustainable use requires not only observation of the environment but key involvement of these people and municipalities. It was also said that scientific knowledge on the Arctic is incomplete but the local people play an important role in observing their environment all year round. The PRISINA project aims to invest in human capital, which will result in better resource management action based on community member's knowledge. The importance of traditional knowledge for biodiversity conservation is also a high priority of the Convention on Biological Diversity. It was underlined that two years after the project started achievements are being made. Local nature resource committees have been set up strengthening the incorporation of indigenous and local knowledge into decision-making. Data and species monitoring has also been improved. 14 proposed management recommendations have been established for 12 species and the project showcases that investing in human capital in the Arctic can support climate change adaptation and resilience, which should be promoted at all levels. Another example provided was the Framework for a Pan-Arctic Network of Marine Protected Areas, which strives for ecological conservation and the protection of marine biodiversity in the context of climate change. It was said that the EU should work more with Arctic states particularly on SDG 14 also recommending that the EU become a permanent observer of the Arctic Council.

**Cedrick Tilma, Representative of the Chair of the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories of the European Union (OCTA)** highlighted that OCTA is a global organisation representing islands and small communities in both the polar and tropical regions. It was stressed that all OCTs are affected by climate change impacting food security, culture, and the economy. There are however also many opportunities underling that increased access to resources can develop alternative sectors such as fisheries and potential global attention to the above challenge. It was also said that OCTs have an advantage in studying first hand these phenomena and in testing adaptation and mitigation measures that can be transferred to other neighbouring countries and up-scaled. Climate change assessments have been conducted and are still underway to examine how best to deal with e.g. risk, adaptation, cost and benefits in OCTs. It was said that the OCTA Strategy for 2014-2020 supports the OCTs in developing strategies to address climate change and facilitate relevant projects in order to bring out the value and potential in contributing to address global issues. It was also



underlined that funding is an essential part of supporting OCTs and the challenges faced by climate change also stressing that they are not eligible for the Global Climate Fund, which is a huge barrier as they represent one of the most vulnerable and affected regions.

**Mira Kleist, Chair of the OCTA Environment & Climate Change working group** underlined that OCTA is active in many different types of fora participating in GLIPSA Steering Committee meetings, UNFCCC COPs, Green Week, and the EU Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW). It was also mentioned that previously this year OCTA organised a Technical Consultative Workshop on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction gathering experts from all OCTs to identify the common challenges that need to be addressed through the EU Development Funds. The importance of GLIPSA was also raised as it provides a global platform for OCTs to take part also stressing that OCTs are small communities that must utilise all platforms in order to spread attention of the challenges faced. It was underlined that OCTs provide a good opportunity to demonstrate climate change actions to be showcased around the world. It was outlined that the OCTs are committed to sustainable energy actions with the main priorities being; energy efficiency and infrastructure; storage and grid management; creation of regulatory frameworks. It was concluded by underlining that future activities of OCTA include continuing to participate at UN climate conferences highlighting the important role of OCTs and climate change as well as engaging at other high-level events promoting global partnerships to tackle the challenges ahead.

**Nathalie Van Isacker, Scientific Officer, International Polar Foundation (IPF)** outlined that the IPF is a private foundation of public utility. It aims to support international polar research in support of evidence based policy-making and to develop an interface between science and society. The foundation works on a range of projects including the annual Arctic Futures Symposium; which brings together policy-makers, scientists, academics, Indigenous Peoples, industry and other stakeholders to discuss a range of challenges faced in the Arctic. The IPF also supports the EU Arctic Information Centre Project which provides reliable knowledge to policy-makers and the public. Further, it was said that they are involved with other projects that entail communicating information, education, and sharing of best practices. The SciencePoles Website was mentioned, which aims to bring science to a general public. The IPF also manages the EducaPoles Website, which aims to raise awareness on the importance of the Polar Regions and of climate change in the educational world. The IPF has developed a range of educational projects targeted towards teachers and provides tools to help them address climate change in their classrooms with young people. The aim is to bring the Polar Regions closer to people and in particular young people in order to connect them to the Arctic. It was mentioned that via workshops, Skype calls, blogs, and other online information young people in Europe can connect to the Arctic region and exchange views and daily lives. With regards to the Paris Agreement, it was stressed that it has entailed great momentum and major participation showing how much people are involved in climate change issues. The importance of social media was underlined as this provides a forum to share experience and knowledge as could be seen for example from the UNFCCC's call for people to answer the question "**What does the Paris Agreement Mean for You?**". It was said that it would be very interesting to learn more about what the Agreement means for young people and in particular for Indigenous young people. It was stressed that many platforms provide visibility



and voices to people. Even though the Arctic is geographically distant, there are many ways to bring regions closer together.

**The debate with the audience** further acknowledged the importance of education, science, adaptation and resilience in tackling climate change. It was mentioned that the discussion is increasingly touching upon climate security and the Commission is working in close collaboration with the EU External Action Service on this. It was said that the Arctic provides the example of how climate and security are aligned, which is an element that needs to be put forward in the Parliament. With regards to the Agreement it was also said that human rights are an essential part of climate change, which need to be taken into account in particular the rights of Indigenous Peoples, which are often easily forgotten. With regards to this it was said that the Commission does consider human rights in its development policy also underlining the importance of climate diplomacy with the EU working in embassies worldwide. Concerning the impacts of climate change the importance of oceans was reiterated stating that the EU has the largest marine domain in the world stressing that the Commission and the Parliament must take responsibility of this great asset and ensure that measures are taken for both adaptation and resilience. The role of the US was further acknowledged highlighting that they will continue to work on many of the issues touched upon here such as scientific research, the impacts of climate change and how to account for science and ensure good policy-making.

**Christel Schaldemose MEP and Chair of the “Arctic” working group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development”** concluded the meeting by reiterating the complexity and importance of tackling climate change in order to reduce the detrimental impacts in the Arctic. The need to raise awareness on the effects it has on people living in the Arctic was also underlined. Further, it was called upon all stakeholders to work in collaboration in order to implement the Agreement and ensure that the changes do not further worsen livelihoods and marine environments. The need for global cooperation was reiterated also stressing that this issue will continue to be pushed forward in the European Parliament.