

The EU in the Arctic

Europe's northern neighborhood

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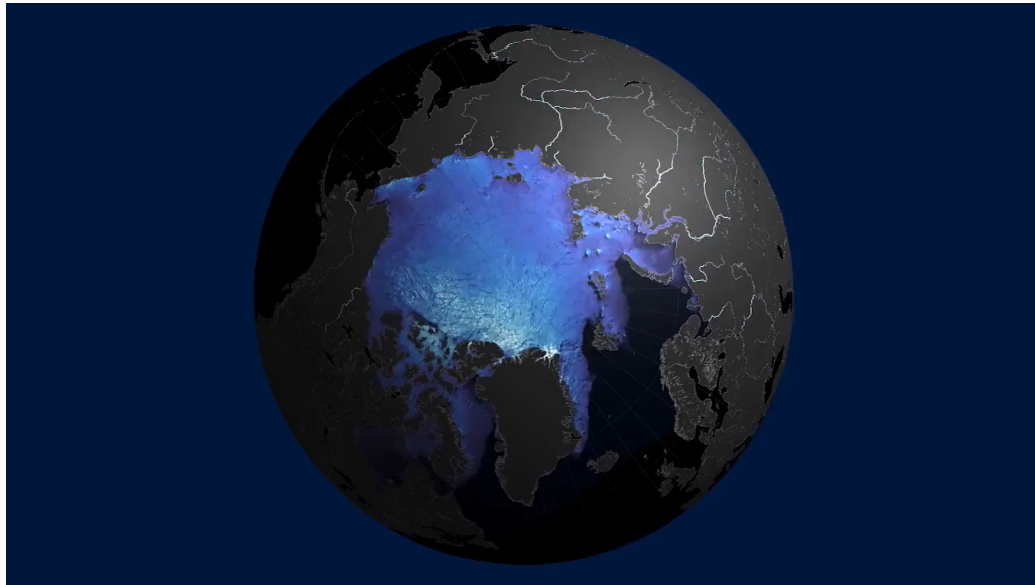
Portland Community College International Speaker Series, Portland OR, 18 May 2026

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The Arctic

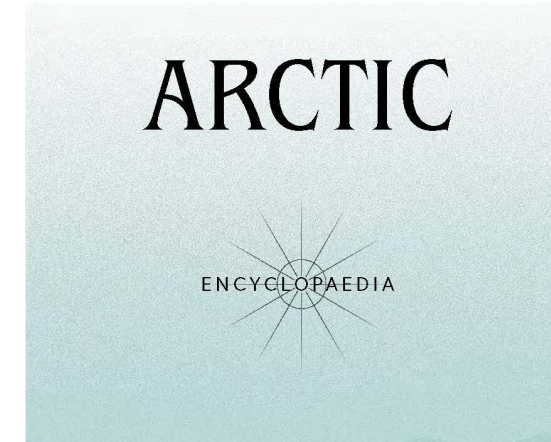
The *bear* atop the world

The Arctic



The Arctic

- Home to ~4 million people (~10% Indigenous)
- Misunderstood, misinterpreted
- Vast, sparsely populated, wild
- Breathtaking, powerful, dangerous
- Developed, innovative, necessary
- A meeting point



The Arctic – or home, as I like to call it – is a commonly misunderstood word, both mythical and real. Mythical because it has long been seen as the final frontier, the great unknown, a place of exceptionalism for centuries. Real because it is home to more than four million people who go to work, dream, and aspire just like anyone else.

The Arctic is as breathtaking in the minds of those who imagine it as a mythical place as it is to those who know it intimately. Aurora Borealis, towering mountains, frozen waters. Vast expanses that open the mind, and long winter nights that forge deep bonds within communities. The myths draw tourists in increasing numbers, but it is the reality that makes people return.

The Arctic cannot be confined to a precise circle or a fixed number of degrees. No single definition has ever been universally agreed upon, despite the fact that people have roamed this region for centuries.

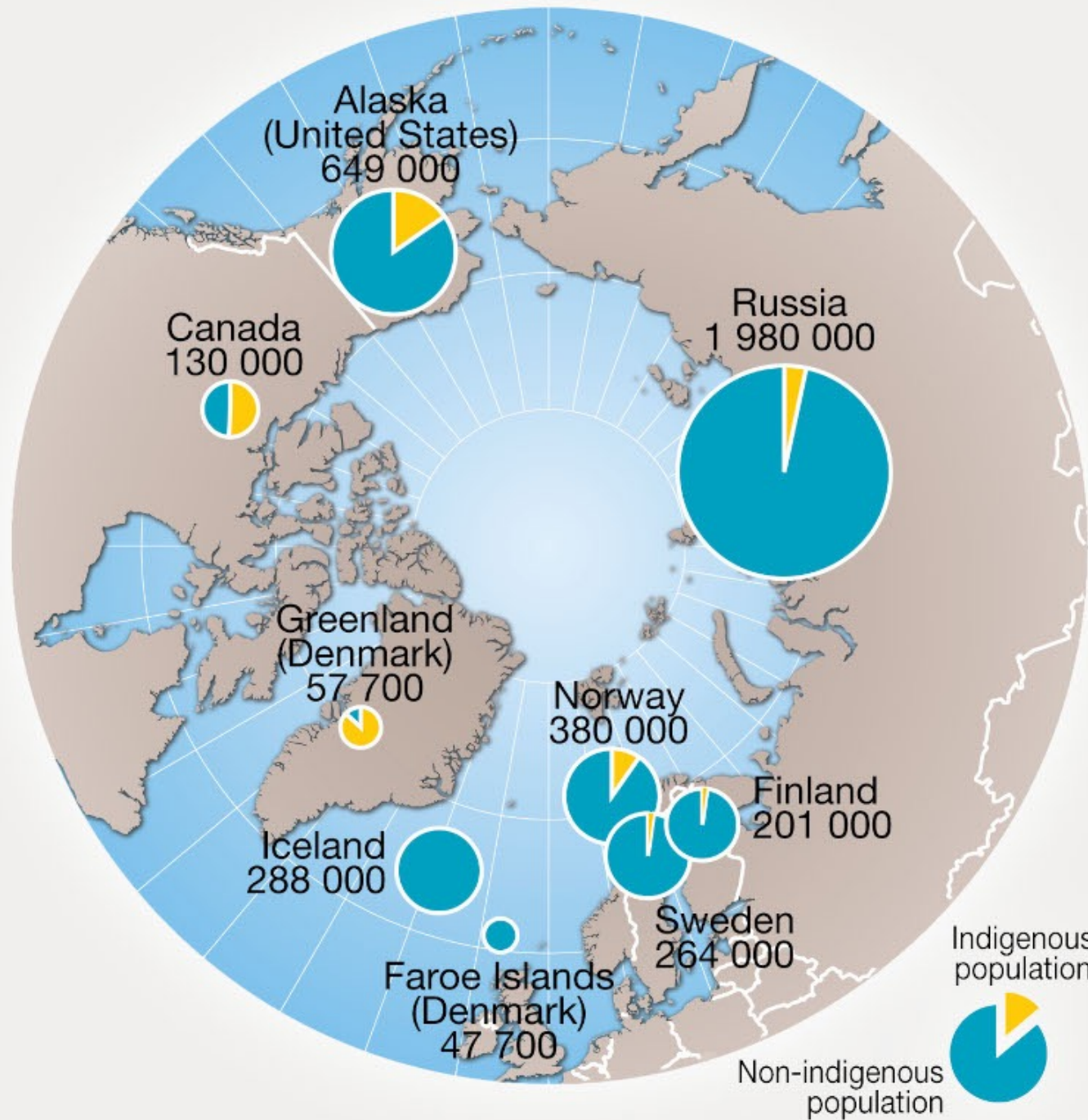
The name "Arctic" originates from the Greeks, derived from "Arktos" – bear – referring to the Great Bear constellation circling the northern sky. Yet, when the Greek sailor Pytheas claimed to have

reached a frozen sea and witnessed the midnight sun – the mysterious Thule – his accounts were met with disbelief. The Arctic has always been a meeting ground. Indigenous peoples traveled and traded across the region long before recorded history. In the ninth century, the Vikings explored uncharted parts of the Arctic, pushing into lands where no one had ventured before. Some have suggested that when humanity first left Africa between 60,000 and 90,000 years ago, some traveled westward into Europe while others journeyed eastward into Asia. Thousands of years later, these distant cousins would reunite in Greenland, when Inuit peoples who had crossed from modern-day Siberia, through Alaska and Canada, met the Vikings who had sailed from present-day Norway, Iceland, and Denmark.

The Arctic is so vast and diverse that it cannot be confined to a snow globe, shaken to create a simple, picturesque scene. Its nicknames are many: the Earth's air conditioner, the canary in the coal mine, the land of exceptionalism, resource-rich yet ungoverned. But the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The Arctic is home – to me, and to many others.

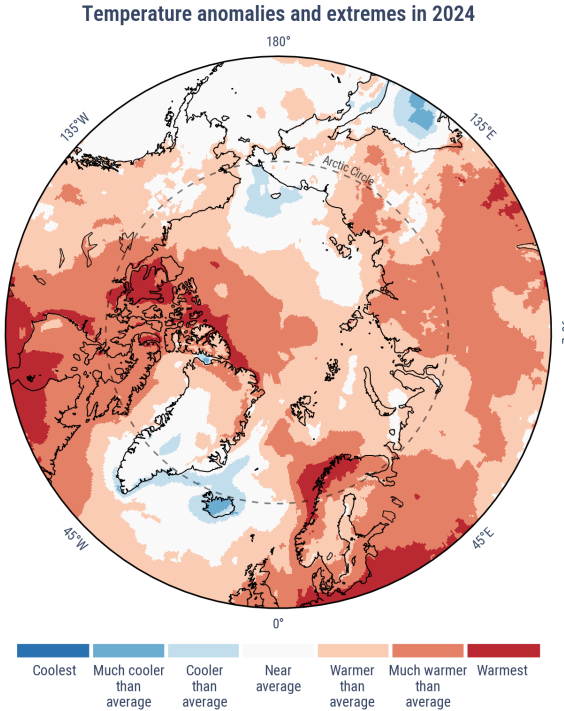
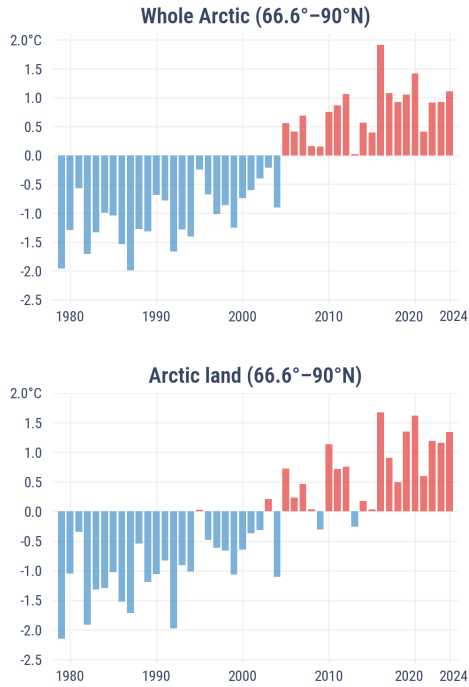
ARCTIC

MADS QVIST FREDERIKSEN

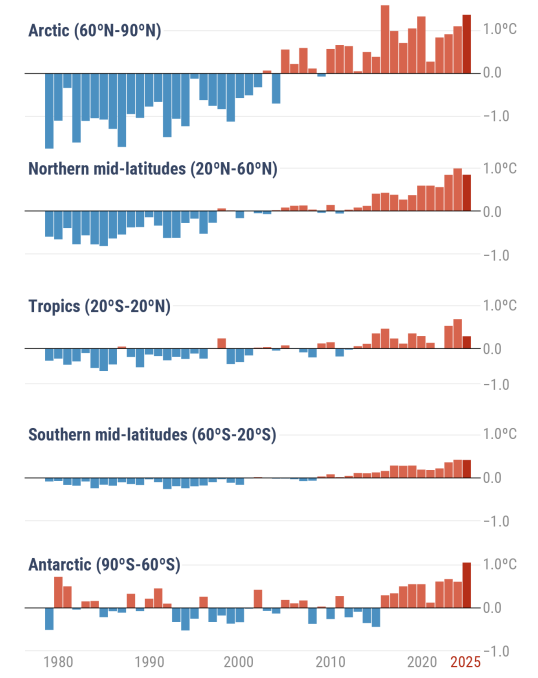
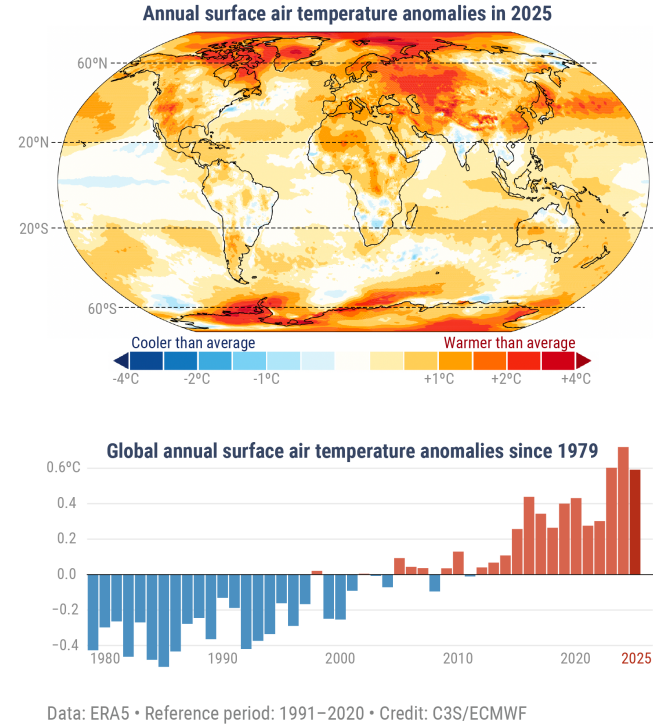


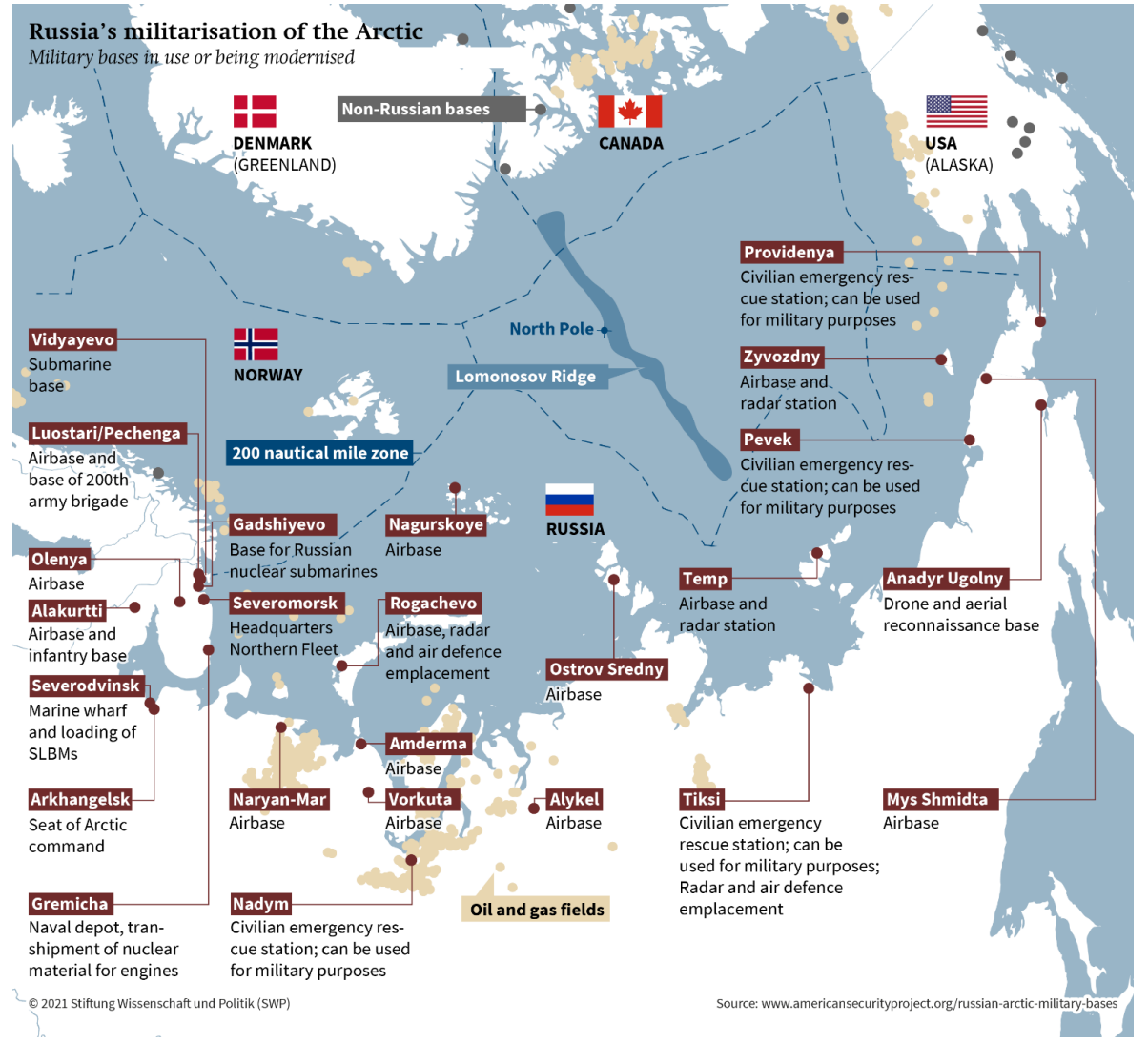
Anomalies in annual surface air temperature in the Arctic

Data: ERA5 (1979–2024) • Reference period: 1991–2020 • Credit: C3S/ECMWF

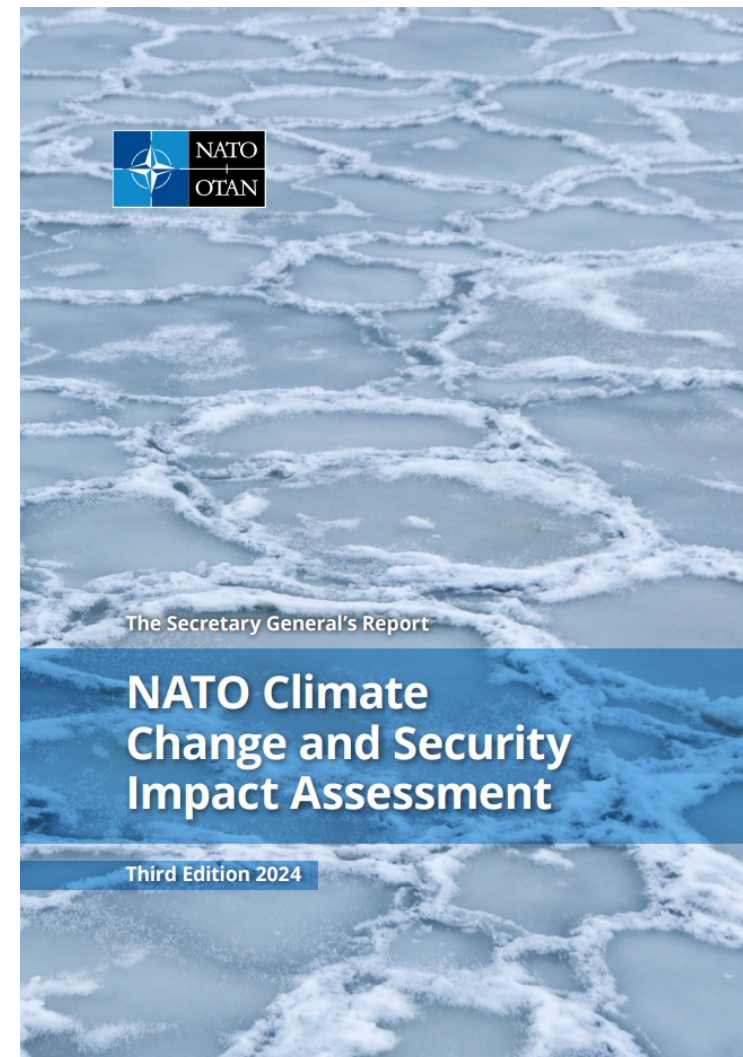


2025 saw higher temperatures in the polar regions

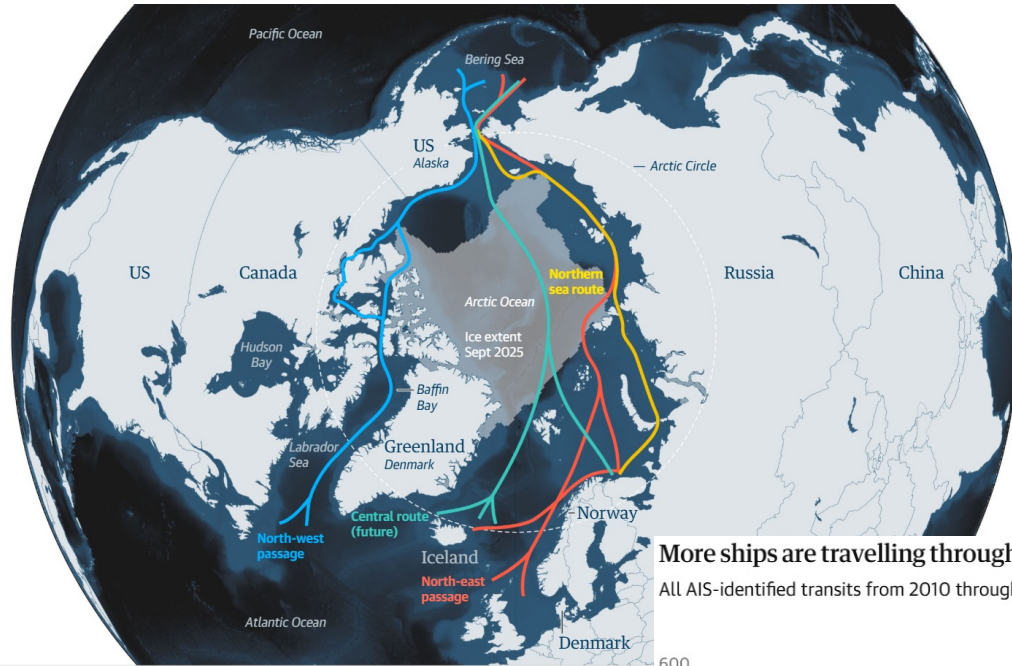




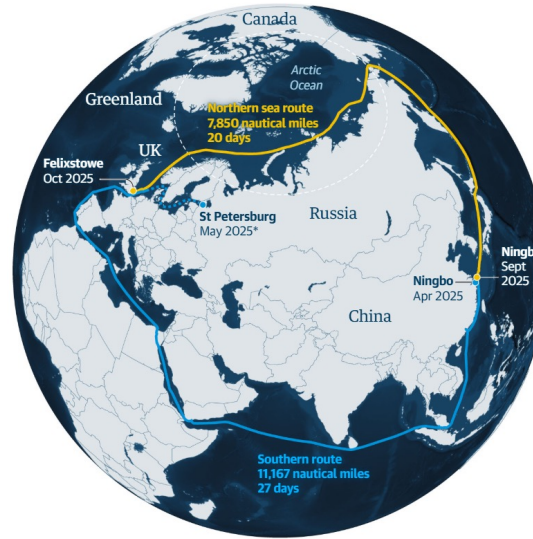
Source: www.americansecurityproject.org/russian-arctic-military-bases



Geophysical to Geoeconomic to Geopolitical changes



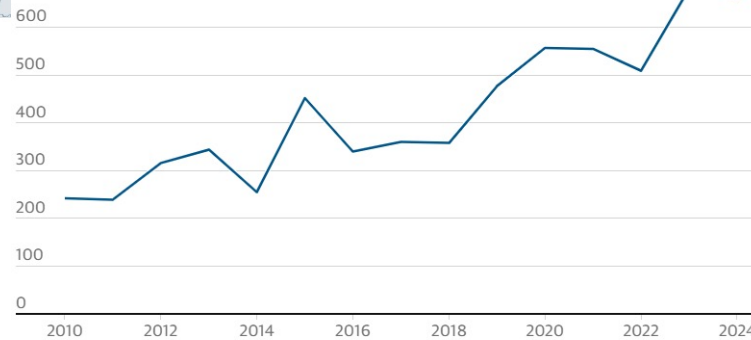
Guardian graphic. Source: Arctic Portal, National Snow and Ice Data Center



Guardian graphic. Source: Tracking data: MarineTraffic. Journey calculations: Centre for High North Logistics. Note: *Distance based on actual journey travelled. Measurements for the vessel's Southern journey from China were calculated up to just past the port of Felixstowe. Transit time excludes port stays

More ships are travelling through the Bering strait

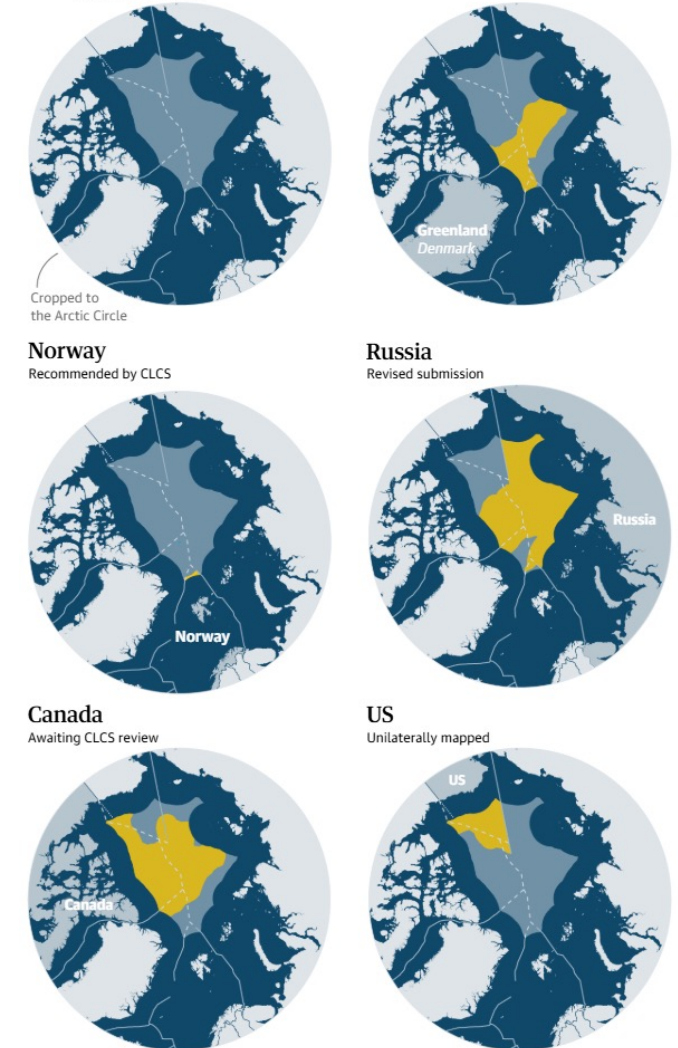
All AIS-identified transits from 2010 through 2024 travelling through the Bering strait



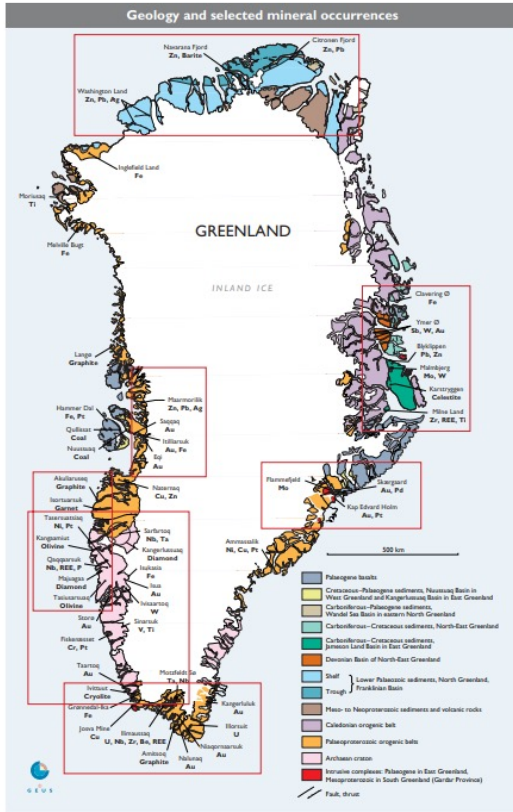
Guardian graphic. Source: Marine Exchange of Alaska. Bering strait is the passage between Russia and Alaska

Continental shelf claims in the central Arctic Ocean

- Agreed borders
- - - Median line
- Unresolved boundary



Map of known mineral occurrences in Greenland



The main geological divisions on the geological map cover periods from Archæan to Palaeogene and are summarised in the map legend.

Chronology of Greenland mineral occurrences

- Major events shown on the map include:
- 1845: Collecting of graphite at Langø (MWG)
 - 1852: Discovery and mining of copper at Josva mine (SG)
 - 1852: Mining in Frederik VII mine (SG)
 - 1854: Mining of lead in Mittuut mine (SG)
 - 1856: Mining of cryolite began in Mittuut mine (SG)
 - 1893: Discovery of zirconium in Kringlerne (SG)
 - 1903: Discovery of graphite at Akuliarseq (WG)
 - 1905: Reopening of the Josva copper mine (SG)
 - 1915: Opening of graphite mine in Armitsoq (SG)
 - 1933: Mining of pyrite in Clavering Island (EG)
 - 1936: Quarrying of marble in Maamonik (WG)
 - 1951: Discovery of iron at Grønneðalika (SG)
 - 1954: Discovery of molybdenum in Malmberg (EG)
 - 1955: Discovery of uranium in Kvanefeld (SG)
 - 1956: Mining initiated of lead/zinc near Mestersvig (EG)
 - 1964: Discovery of chromium in Qeqertarsuaiaat (WG)
 - 1965: Discovery of the iron deposit at Isua (WG)
 - 1968: Discovery of REE and phosphorus at Qaqqarsuk (WG)
 - 1972: Discovery of gold in Taartoq (SG)
 - 1973: Mining began of lead/zinc at Black Angel Mine (WG)
 - 1973: Discovery of placer diamonds in Sarfartoq (WG)
 - 1977: Discovery of niobium in Sarfartoq (WG)
 - 1979: Test mining of uranium in Kvanefeld (SG)
 - 1979: Discovery of tungsten and antimony at Ymer Island (EG)
 - 1980: Discovery of tantalum at Motzfeldt Lake (SG)
 - 1982: Discovery of tungsten and gold in Nuuk Fjord (WG)
 - 1984: Discovery of zirconium in Navarana fjord (NG)
 - 1985: Discovery of gold in Disko Bay area (WG)
 - 1986: Discovery of gold and PGE's in Skaergaard (EG)
 - 1992: Discovery of primary gold at Nalunaq (SG)
 - 1993: Discovery of zinc at Citronen Fjord (NG)
 - 1995: Find of in-situ diamonds near Manitsq (WG)
 - 1995: Small-scale production of olivine at Evighedsfjord (WG)
 - 1996: Discovery of gold at Kangerluluk (SEG)
 - 2009: Production of gold at Akuliarseq (WG)

Treasure map

Arctic countries with significant reserves of selected natural resources

Greenland (Denmark)
Cobalt, copper, graphite, lithium, nickel, rare earths

Iceland
Aluminium

Norway
Copper, nickel, silver

Sweden
Copper, rare earths, silver, zinc

Finland
Cobalt, copper, graphite, lithium, nickel

Canada
Copper, nickel, rare earths, zinc

Alaska (US)
Copper, rare earths, silver, zinc

Dutch
• Harbour

Russia
Aluminium, cobalt, copper, nickel, rare earths, silver

Metal deposits ● Base ● Precious ● Ferrous ● Energy ● Special
▲ Hydrothermal fields ◆ Diamond deposits

Sources: Geological Survey of Norway; The Arctic Institute; *The Economist*

Undiscovered deposits, probability of oil and/or gas field*, 2008 estimates, %
Source: USGS



*At least one undiscovered oil and/or gas field with recoverable reserves greater than 50m barrels of oil equivalent



Figure 2 Far North Fiber and Polar Connect. Source: NORDUnet. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

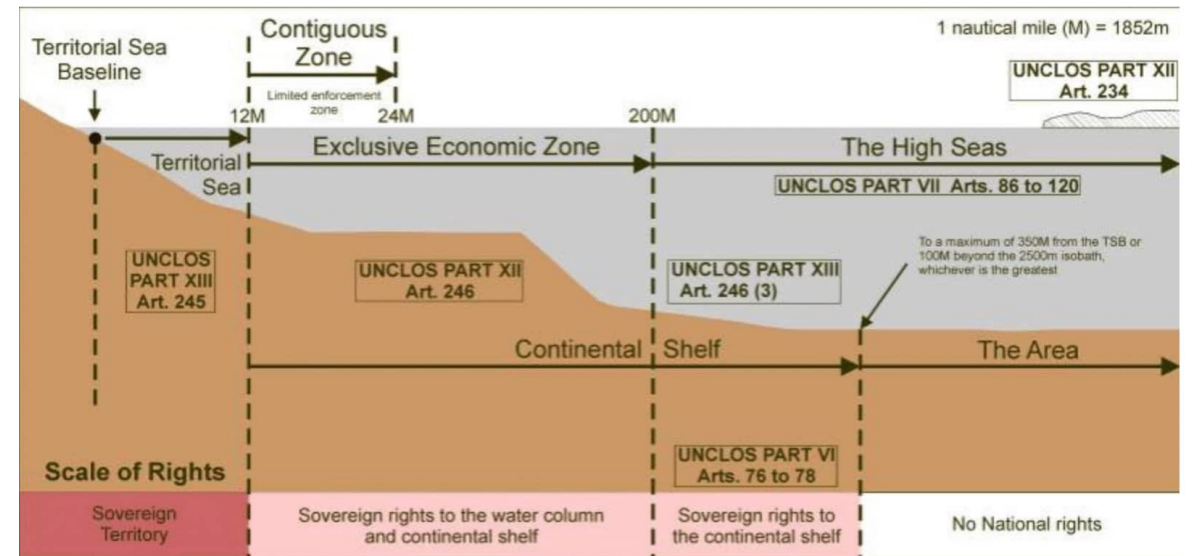
https://eng.geus.dk/media/13395/go_fs05.pdf

Arctic Governance

A brief overview

(International) Governance in the Arctic

- Landmass: eight sovereign states, with different internal structures
- Arctic Ocean: UNCLOS – The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, or the “Constitution of the Ocean”.







Exclusive Economic Zones

EEZs of the Arctic

The Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of the Arctic refer to the maritime zones that extend 200 nautical miles out from the coastal baseline of the Arctic nations. These zones are established under international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to grant coastal states exclusive rights and jurisdiction over the exploration and exploitation of natural resources within these areas.

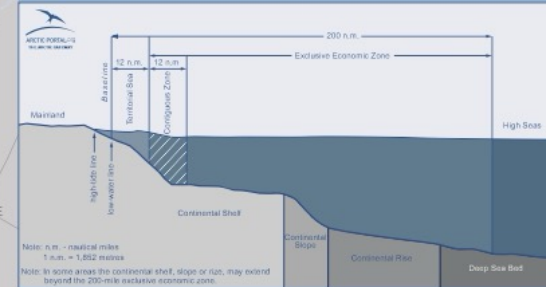
The EEZs of the Arctic represent a complex geopolitical and environmental landscape. The Arctic region is of increasing global importance due to its vast reserves of oil, gas, minerals, and its strategic shipping routes that are becoming more accessible due to melting sea ice caused by climate change. Balancing economic opportunities with environmental preservation and indigenous rights poses significant challenges. The Arctic Nations assert their rights over their respective EEZs, they also engage in discussions and negotiations to address overlapping claims and ensure responsible resource management. As the region continues to undergo rapid changes, cooperation among Arctic nations is crucial to maintain stability, address environmental concerns, and foster sustainable development in this unique and fragile ecosystem.

 Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

 International Waters / High Seas do not belong to any state's jurisdiction, known under the doctrine of 'mare liberum'. States have the right to fishing, navigation, overflight, laying cables and pipelines, as well as scientific research.

 Arctic Circle

Source: Arctic Portal.org



The Arctic Council

- An Intergovernmental Forum
- 8 Arctic States
- 6 Permanent Participants (indigenous representation)
- 6 Working Groups
- 38+1 Observers (13 states, 13 organizations, 12 NGOs, and the EU, the plus one)



ARCTIC COUNCIL MEMBERS & OBSERVERS



ARCTIC COUNCIL MEMBER STATES

- Canada
- The Kingdom of Denmark
- Finland
- Iceland
- Norway
- Russian Federation
- Sweden
- United States of America

PERMANENT PARTICIPANTS

- Alut International Association (AIA)
- Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC)
- Gwich'in Council International (GCI)
- Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)
- Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON)
- Saami Council (SC)

WORKING GROUPS

- ACAP*
- AMAP
- CAFF
- EPHW
- IRMC
- SOMG

ARCTIC COUNCIL OBSERVERS STATES

- France - Barrow Ministerial meeting, 2000
- Germany - Iqaluit Ministerial meeting, 1998
- Italian Republic - Kiruna Ministerial meeting, 2012
- Japan - Kiruna Ministerial meeting, 2013
- The Netherlands - Iqaluit Ministerial meeting, 1998
- People's Republic of China - Kiruna Ministerial meeting, 2013
- Republic of India - Iqaluit Ministerial meeting, 1998
- Republic of India - Kiruna Ministerial meeting, 2013
- Republic of Korea - Kiruna Ministerial meeting, 2013
- Republic of Singapore - Kiruna Ministerial meeting, 2013
- Spain - Salekhard Ministerial meeting, 2008
- Switzerland - Fairbanks Ministerial meeting, 2017
- United Kingdom - Iqaluit Ministerial meeting, 1998

THIRTEEN INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATIONS HAVE AN APPROVED OBSERVER STATUS:

- International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) - Fairbanks Ministerial meeting, 2017
- International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) - Barrow Ministerial meeting, 2000
- International Maritime Organization (IMO) - Rovaniemi Ministerial meeting, 2019
- International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) - Barrow Ministerial meeting, 2000*
- Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) - Barrow Ministerial meeting, 2000*
- Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) - Reykjavik Ministerial meeting, 2004
- North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) - Barrow Ministerial meeting, 2000
- OSPAR Commission - Fairbanks Ministerial, 2017
- Standing Committee of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR) - Iqaluit Ministerial meeting, 1998*
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - Inari Ministerial meeting 2002
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) - Iqaluit Ministerial meeting, 1998*
- World Meteorological Organization (WMO) - Fairbanks Ministerial meeting, 2017
- West Nordic Council (WNC) - Fairbanks Ministerial meeting, 2017

*At the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting in 2013, the Arctic Council "receive[d] the application of the EU for Observer status affirmatively", but deferred a final decision. UNF and now five as Ministers of the Arctic States may reach a final decision, the EU may observe Council proceedings.
 **Also present at the signing ceremony" in Ottawa 19 September, 1998

TWELVE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE APPROVED OBSERVERS IN THE ARCTIC COUNCIL:

- Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea (ACOPS) - Barrow Ministerial meeting, 2000*
- Arctic Institute of North America (AINA) (Formerly Arctic Cultural Gateway (ACG)) - Reykjavik Ministerial meeting, 2004
- Association of World Reindeer Herders (AWRH) - Barrow Ministerial meeting, 2000
- Circumpolar Conservation Union (CCU) - Barrow Ministerial meeting, 2000
- International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) - Iqaluit Ministerial meeting, 1998*
- International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA) - Barrow Ministerial meeting, 2000
- International Union for Circumpolar Health (IUCH) - Iqaluit Ministerial meeting, 1998*
- International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) - Inari Ministerial meeting, 2002
- Northern Forum (NF) - Iqaluit Ministerial meeting, 1998
- Oceano - Fairbanks Ministerial meeting, 2017
- University of the Arctic (UArctic) - Inari Ministerial meeting, 2002
- World Wide Fund for Nature-Global Arctic Program (WWF) - Iqaluit Ministerial meeting, 1998*

A complex ecosystem

AGREEMENTS, CONVENTIONS, COVENANTS, DECLARATIONS, TREATIES	Kingdom of Denmark										
	CANADA	DENMARK	FAROE ISLANDS	GREENLAND	FINLAND	ICELAND	NORWAY	SWEDEN	RUSSIAN FEDERATION	U.S.	
MAIN INTERNATIONAL TREATIES RELEVANT FOR THE ARCTIC											
International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (1946)		denounced*	1957	v	v	1983	2002*	1960*	1979	1948	1947
Int. Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, MARPOL (1973) ⁹	x	1983	v	v	1983	x	1983	1983	x	1983	1983
International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, SOLAS (1974) ¹⁰		1980	1980	v	v	1981	1983	1980	1980	1980	1980
UN Convention on the Law of the Sea UNCLOS (1982)		2003	2004	v	v	1996	1995	1996	1996	1997	1994*
The North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission NEAFC (1980) ⁶		1980*	1980	v	v	1980	1980	1980	1980	1980	x
UN Fish Stocks Convention (1995)		1999	2003	v	v	2003	1997	1996	2003	1997	1996
The Ilulissat Declaration (2008)		2008	2008	v	v	x	x	2008	x	2008	2008
IMO - International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Water Polar Code (2015)		2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017
Agreement to prevent unregulated high seas fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (2018)		2021	2021	v	v	10 EU	2021	2021	10 EU	2021	2021
UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966)		1976*	1972*	v	v	1975*	1979*	1971*	1971*	1973*	1992*
UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966)		1976*	1972*	v	v	1975	1979	1971*	1971*	1973*	1977*
UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)		1970*	1971*	v	v	1970*	1967*	1970*	1971*	1969*	1994*
ILO C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention ILO Convention No. 169 or C169 (1989)	x	1996	v	v	x	x	1990	x	x	x	x
The Antarctic Treaty (1959) ¹¹		1998*	1965*	v	v	1984	2015*	1961	1998	1959	1959
UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples UNDRIP (2007)		2016	2007	v	v	2007	2007	2007	2007	2007*	2016
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora CITES (1973)		1975	1977*	e	v	1976	2000*	1976	1975	1992	1975
UN Convention on Biological Diversity CBD (1992)		1992*	1993	v	v	1994	1994	1993	1993	1995	1993*
Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears, Oslo (1973) ¹²		1973	1973	v	v	x	x	1973	x	1973	1973
Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, Geneva (1979)		1981	1982	v	v	1981	1983	1981	1981	1980	1981
Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context Espoo Convention, Espoo (F) (1991)		1998	1997	v	v	1995	1991*	1993	1992	1991*	1991*
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change UNFCCC (1992)		1992*	1993	v	v	1994	1993	1993	1993	1994	1992
Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Kyoto Protocol (1997)	denounced*	2002	d	v	2002	2002	2002	2002	2002	2004	1998*
UN Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2001)		2001	2003	v	e	2002	2002	2002	2002	2011*	2001*
UNEP Minamata Convention on Mercury (2013)		2017	2017	v	v	2017	2018	2017	2017	x	2013
International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments (2004)		2010	2012	v	e	2016	x	2007	2009*	2012	
The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy AEPS (1991)		1991	1991	v	v	1991	1991	1991	1991	1991	1991
The Paris Agreement (2015)		2016	2016	v	v	2016	2016	2016	2016	2016	2016
Svalbard Treaty (1920)		1923	1924*	v	v	1925	1994	1924*	1924*	1935	1924*
AGREEMENTS UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL											
Declaration on Establishment of The Arctic Council (1996)		1996	1996	v	v	1996	1996	1996	1996	1996	1996
Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic SAR or Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement (2011)		2011	2011	v	v	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011	2011
Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic MOBRAP (2013)		2013	2013	v	v	2013	2013	2013	2013	2013	2013
Fairbanks Declaration (2017)		2017	2017	v	v	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017
Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation (2017)		2017	2017	v	v	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017

LEGEND

Type of Agreement	x	Not party to the treaty	1	Party with reservations
Flora & Fauna	v	The Danish Constitution stipulates that the foreign and security interests for all parts of the Kingdom of Denmark are the responsibility of the Danish government. Unless stated otherwise, the treaties in this table apply to the Kingdom of Denmark, that is to say, also to Faroe and Greenland via Denmark.	2	Party with reservations and objections
Climate Change / Environment	a	(Adherence with reservation to Paragraph 10 (e))	3	Original signatory, 1920
Sea / Shipping / Fishing	b	(With reservation about Faroe Islands)	4	(ratified 1949, denounced 1981)
Civil / Political / Social rights	c	Does not apply to Faroe Islands until further notice	5	(ratified 1996, denounced 2011)
Sovereignty	d	With territorial exclusion of the Faroe Islands	6	Signed 1980 but entered into force in 1982. Replaced the earlier 1959 NEAFC.
Arctic Council Specific	e	With territorial exclusion of Greenland	7	Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties.
	x	Signed, but not ratified	8	Signed by twelve countries in 1959 but entered into force in 1961 and has since been accorded to by many other nations.
	10 EU	EU is party to the Agreement. The State is therefore represented through the EU.	9	Non-consultative / can attend the Consultative Meetings but do not participate in the decision-making.
			10	The Agreement was signed in Oslo on November 15, 1973, and entered into force on May 26, 1976.
			11	Russian Feder. abstained from voting.
			12	Adopted 2 November 1973, entered into force 2 October 1983.
			12	Adopted 1 November 1974, entered into force 25 May 1980.

The European Union

A project of peace and prosperity

The European Union

- A **supranational** political and economic union of 27 states, ~450 million citizens
- Largest transnational market in the world, based on the four freedoms – free movement of **goods, capital, people, and services**
- Pooled / shared sovereignty in certain areas (**EU competences**)
- Largest transnational directly elected Parliament in the world
- An organization for peace and prosperity
- An area of democracy, rule of law, stability and predictability




Based on **three principles**:

- Conferral
- Proportionality
- Subsidiarity

EU competences

EU competences

Exclusive	Shared	Support, coordinate or supplement actions of the member states	Provide arrangements within which EU member states must coordinate policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • customs union • the establishing of the competition rules necessary for the functioning of the internal market • monetary policy for the member states whose currency is the euro • conservation of marine biological resources under the common fisheries policy • common commercial policy • concluding international agreements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when their conclusion is required by a legislative act of the EU • when their conclusion is necessary to enable the EU to exercise its internal competence • in so far as their conclusion may affect common rules or alter their scope. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal market • social policy, limited to the aspects defined in the TFEU • economic, social and territorial cohesion • agriculture and fisheries, excluding the conservation of marine biological resources • environment • consumer protection • transport • trans-European networks • energy • area of freedom, security and justice • common safety concerns in public health matters, limited to the aspects defined in the TFEU • research, technological development and space • development cooperation and humanitarian aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protection and improvement of human health • industry • culture • tourism • education, vocational training, youth and sport • civil protection • administrative cooperation <p><i>Legally binding EU acts in these areas cannot imply the harmonisation of national laws or regulations.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • economic policy • employment • social policies 
Article 3 TFEU	Article 4 TFEU	Article 6 TFEU	Article 5 TFEU

Exclusive: *only* the EU can act/legislate

Shared: Member States can act *only* if the EU has chosen not to

Support: the EU may *not* adopt legally binding acts that require the Member States to harmonize their laws and regulations

The EU Member States

1951

Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Netherlands

1973

Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom (the UK left the EU in 2020)

1981

Greece

1986

Spain and Portugal

1995

Austria, Finland and Sweden

2004

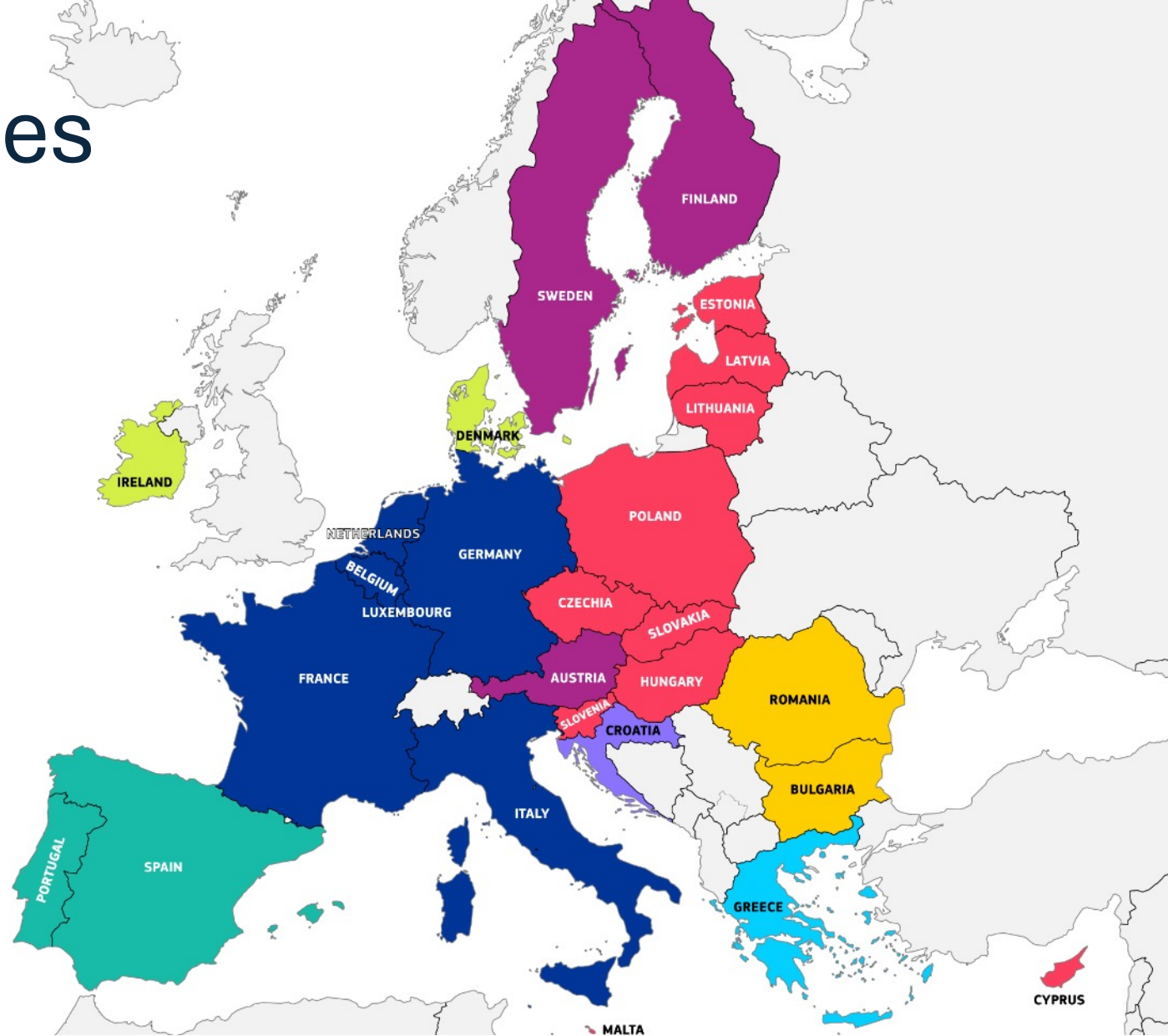
Czechia, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia

2007

Bulgaria and Romania

2013

Croatia



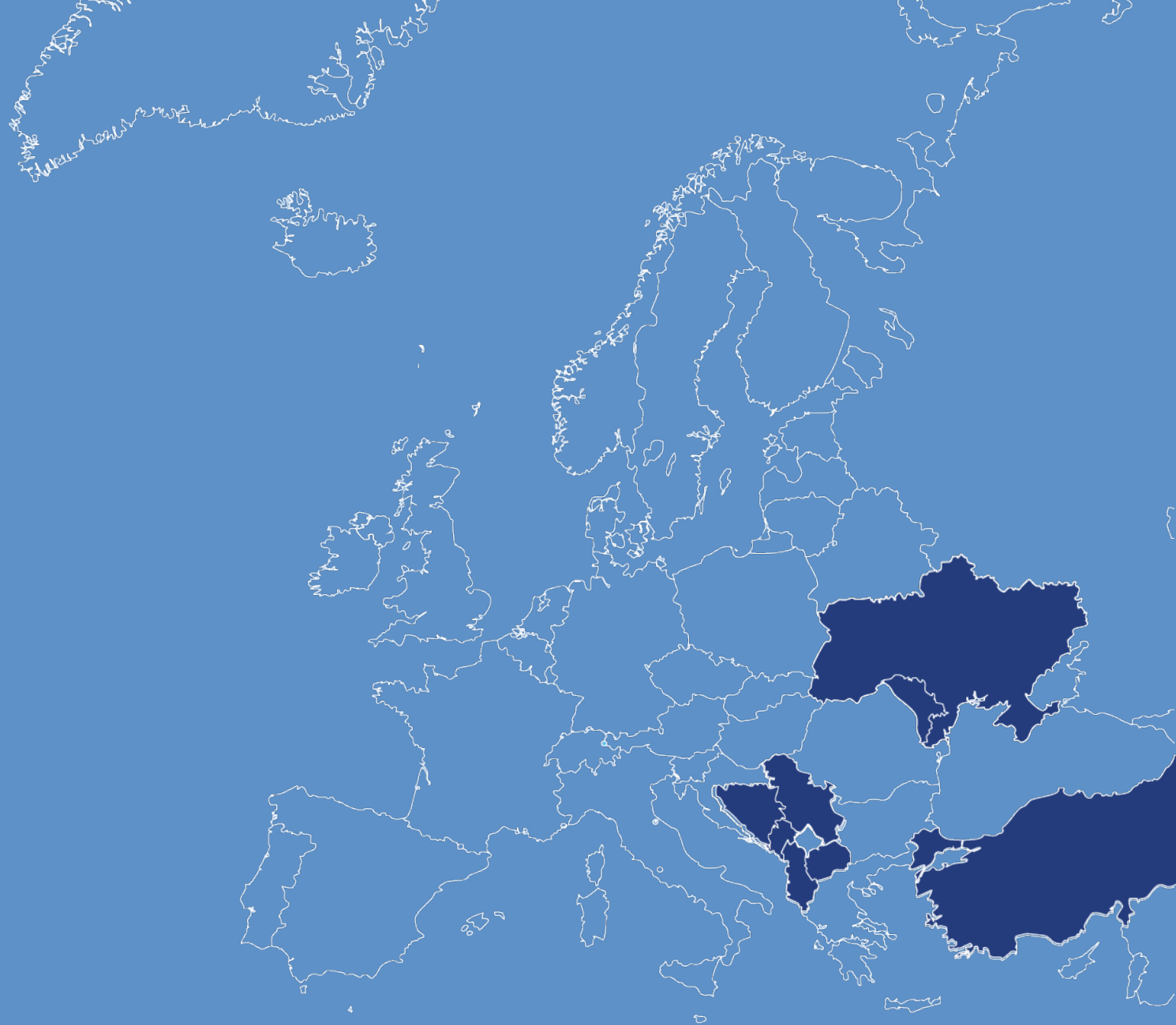
Source

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © Turkstat

Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 10/2024

Candidate countries

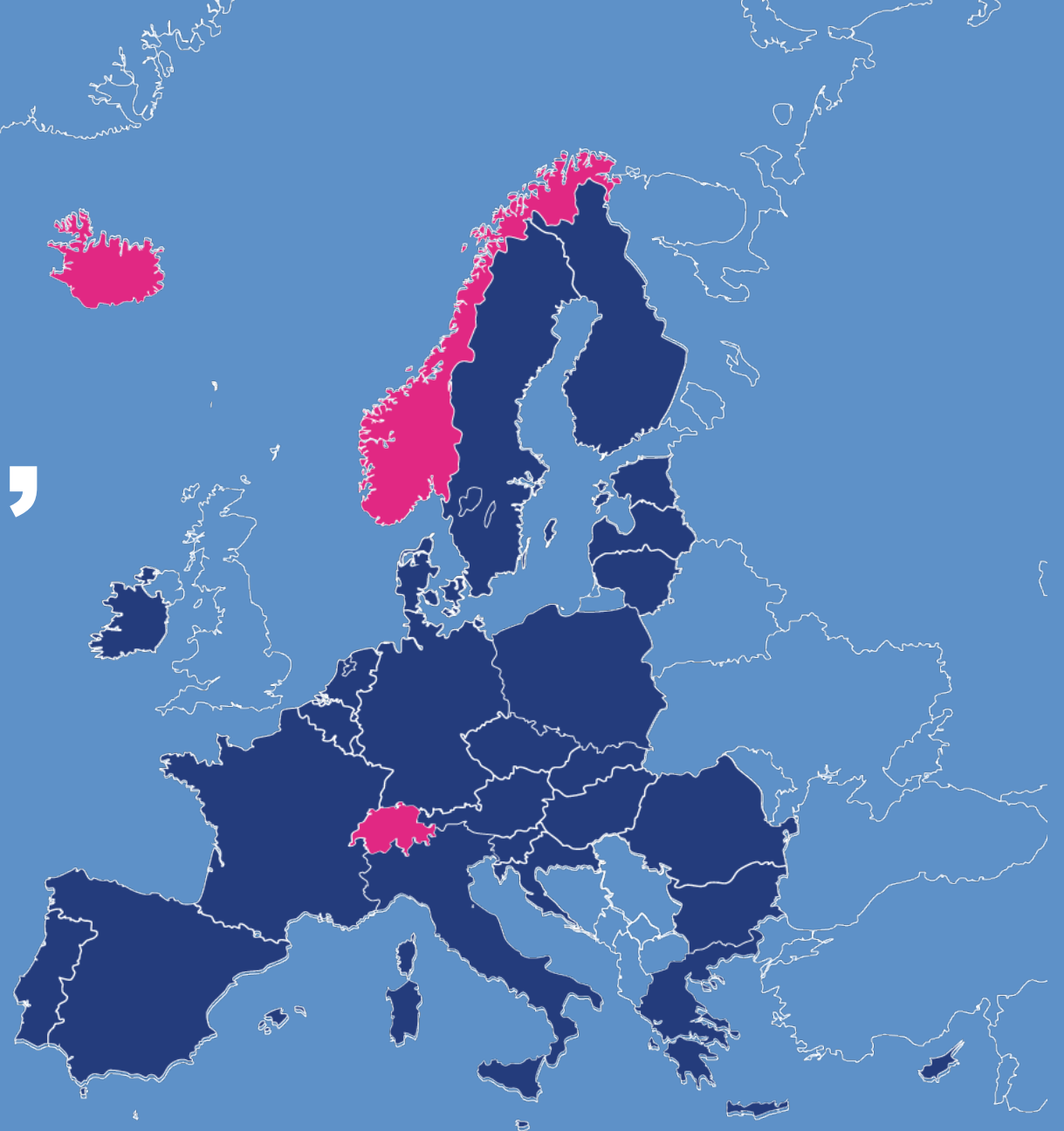
- Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Moldova
- North Macedonia
- Montenegro
- Serbia
- Türkiye
- Ukraine



Many countries, few limits

The EU consists
of 27 Member States

In addition to the 27 Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland are part of the **European Single Market**. The **Schengen area** brings together 25 EU and 4 non-EU countries that have abolished passport controls at their borders (as of May 2026).

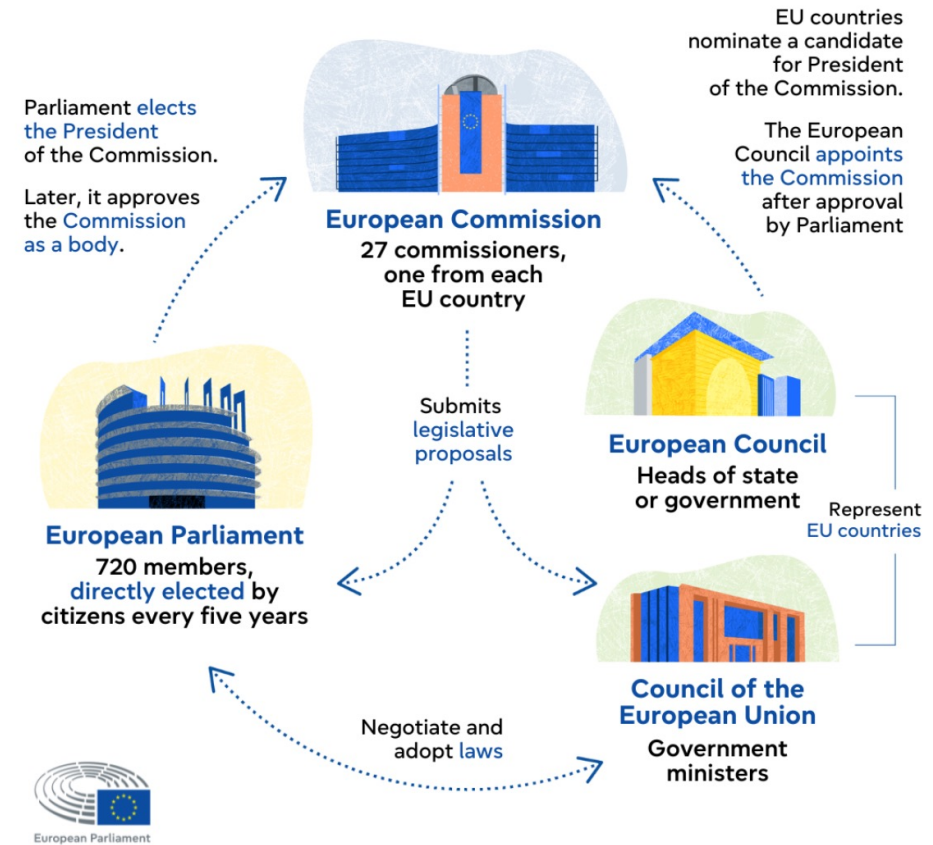


EU Institutional Architecture

EU institutions

- European Commission
- European Council (HoGS)
- Council of the EU (MSs)
- EU Parliament (EU citizens)
- European Central Bank
- Court of Justice of the EU
- Court of Auditors
- + different EU bodies (EESC, CoR, EEAS, etc.)

EU governance and decision-making



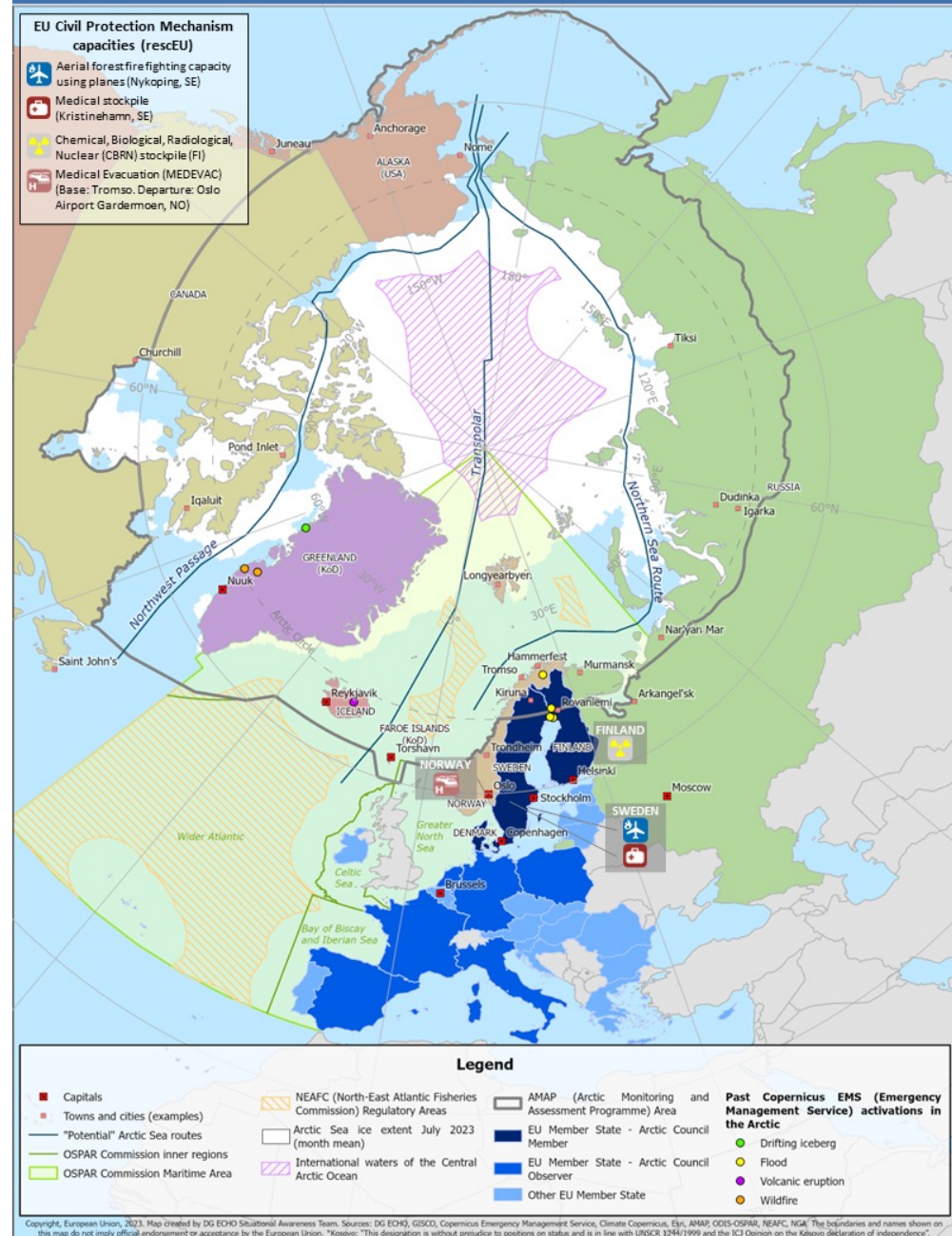
The EU Arctic policy

Strategic and daily interests

The EU and the Arctic

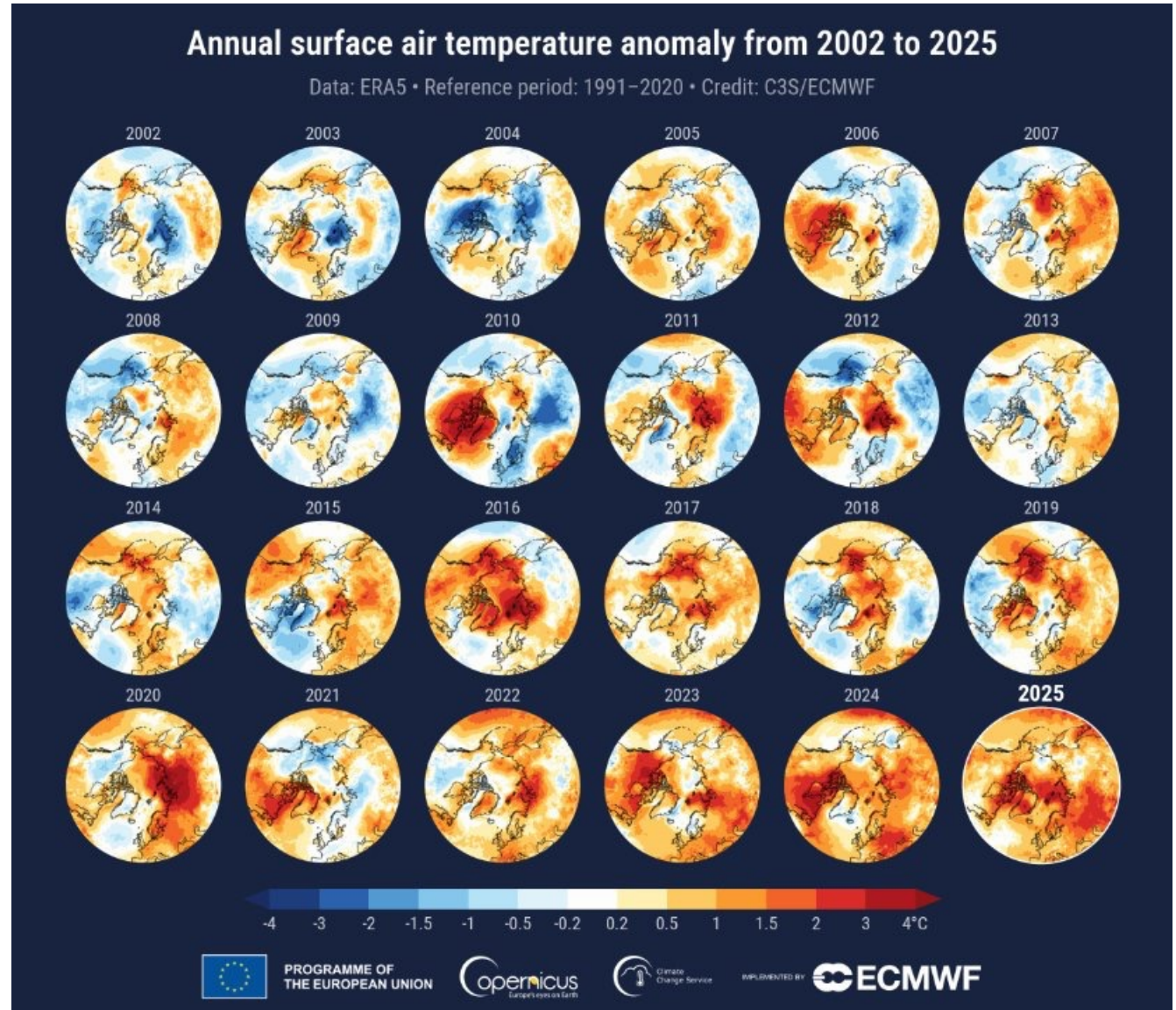
The EU is in the Arctic:

- Through SE and FI (and DK/KoD)
- Through the Single Market and our economic impact
- Through the Schengen area
- Through sectoral programs (Horizon, space, civil protection, etc.)
- Hundreds of thousands of people living in the Arctic are EU citizens (~700,000)



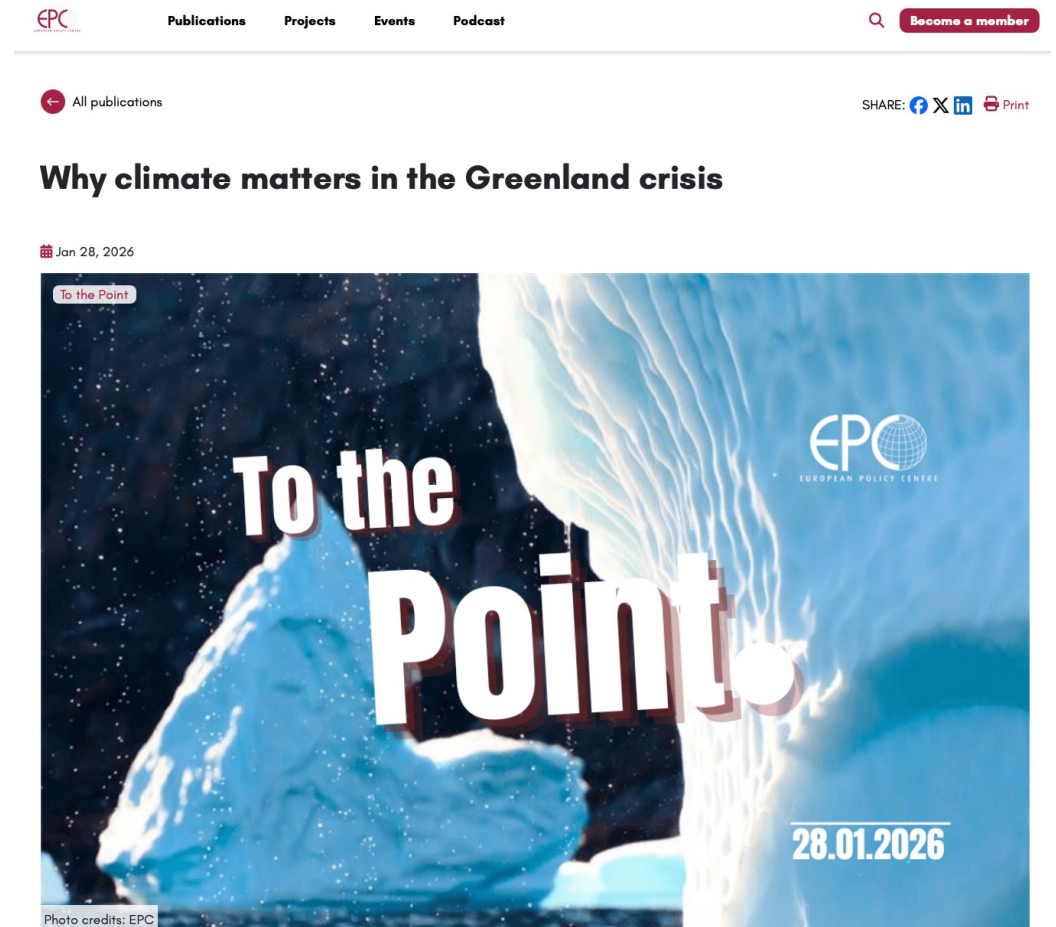
A changing Arctic

- Climate change
- Environmental degradation
- Pollution
- Biodiversity loss
- Sustainable development
- Research and innovation
- Geopolitics



Changes and stressors since 2022

- Russian invasion of Ukraine
- SE and FI accession to NATO
- Arctic Council paused and resumed activities
- Bilateral cooperation with Russia ends (science, environmental, people-to-people, economic)
- Acceleration of climate change, ice retreat
- Geoeconomics and geopolitical race
- Increased Chinese presence in the Russian Arctic
- The Greenland crisis



The EU Arctic Policy



The EU Arctic Policy – 2021 update

Current EU Arctic policy

Objectives:

1. A peaceful and constructive **dialogue** and **cooperation** to keep the Arctic **safe** and **stable**;
2. Addressing the **ecological, social, economic** and **political challenges** linked to **climate change** and **environmental degradation**;
3. **Inclusive and sustainable development** of the Arctic to the benefit of its inhabitants and future generations.

The ongoing update process - 2026

- Announced by President VDL in Iceland in July 2025.
- Call for evidence, public consultation closed in March 2026.
- Jyrki Katainen, Special Adviser for the EU-Arctic relations ([April 2026](#)).
- Drafting ongoing.



The screenshot shows the European Commission website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the European Commission logo, a search bar containing 'Search on Europa', and links for 'Log in' and 'EN'. Below the navigation bar, the page title is 'EU Arctic policy – Update'. A breadcrumb trail reads: 'Have your say - Public Consultations and Feedback > Published Initiatives > EU Arctic policy – Update'. On the left side, a vertical timeline indicates the process stages: 'In preparation', 'Call for evidence', 'Public consultation' (highlighted with an orange circle), 'Upcoming', and 'Commission adoption'. The 'Public consultation' stage includes the text 'Feedback and consultation period' and '22 December 2025 - 16 March 2026', with a 'Feedback: Open' button. On the right side, the 'About this initiative' section contains a 'Summary' and a 'Topic'. The 'Summary' states: 'The Arctic is facing major concerns:' followed by a bulleted list: '- climate change, which disproportionately affects its inhabitants', '- increased military presence and hybrid activity, driven by geopolitical & geoeconomic shifts', and '- threats to its economic security, social balance, cohesion and safety triggered by growing interest in sustainable materials, energy and new trade routes.' Below this, it notes: 'Arctic States hold primary responsibility for domestic developments, but multilateral cooperation is vital to address these new challenges.' The 'Topic' is listed as: 'Business and industry, Climate action, Competition, Energy, Environment, Foreign affairs and security policy, Institutional affairs, International partnerships, Maritime affairs and fisheries, Public health, Regional policy, Research and innovation, Trade, Transport'. The 'Type of act' is identified as 'Joint communication'.

What does the EU bring to the Arctic?

European Arctic

- Science, research and innovation (Horizon, Copernicus, Erasmus)
- Sustainable development (EIB, EGD, Copernicus, Galileo)
- Regional cohesion and development (Interreg)
- Rule of Law, predictability

The larger Arctic

- Support to Arctic and Indigenous organizations (Arctic Council, Arctic Mayors' Forum, Sámi Council)
- Science, research and innovation
- Development and investments
- Cooperation

The EU Arctic policy and Arctic matters

- Local stakeholders
- Sustainable development
- Local communities and Indigenous Peoples
- Climate change, pollution, hydrocarbons
- Civilian safety
- Research and Innovation
- Geopolitics



What the EU does in the Arctic (examples)



Science and science diplomacy

Horizon Europe, Copernicus Arctic Hub, AAORIA (All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance).



Sustainable development and green transition

EIB loans, European Green Deal, critical raw materials, blue economy, sustainable use of Copernicus and Galileo.



Regional cohesion

Interreg Northern Periphery & Arctic; Aurora cross-border program.



Indigenous engagement

Sámi Council support, engagement with the Sámi Parliaments; Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue (IPD); Arctic Youth Dialogue (strong Indigenous participation)



Civil protection

Union Civil Protection Mechanism: emergency response activatable by any Arctic country, plus common work with the AC's EPPR WG.

EU funding in the Arctic (examples)

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

€372m

Arctic research under Horizon 2020 + Horizon Europe (through mid-2024)

MFF 2028-2034 proposal: €175bn total Horizon Europe (≈ doubled from €95.5bn)

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

€273m

Interreg Northern Periphery & Arctic + Aurora programs (2021-2027)

MFF 2028-2034 proposal: €10.26bn total Interreg (broadly flat vs. ≈€10bn today)

EU-GREENLAND



€328.8m

Combined EU funding to Greenland (OCT + sustainable fisheries)

OCT / NDICI: €225m (2021-2027), education and green growth

SFPA: €103.8m (2025-2030), €17.3m/year

MFF 2028-2034 proposal: ≈€1bn for the 13 OCTs combined

MOBILITY

11,000 / 26,800

Arctic participants in Erasmus+ outbound / inbound (2019-2022)

Current MFF 2021-2027 figures and Commission proposal for MFF 2028-2034

Sources: European Commission (DG MARE, DG RTD, DG REGIO, DG INTPA); COM proposals for MFF 2028-2034 (16 July 2025)

EU–GL: 40 years of ongoing partnership

A long partnership:

- Greenland **left the European Economic Community in 1985**, after a 1982 referendum.
- The relationship continued through the **Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT)** framework.
- Greenlanders are **EU citizens** by virtue of their Danish passport.
- Bilateral cooperation runs through **Greenland-related and -specific instruments** (the OCT Decision, the SFPA), Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ association, and increasingly through direct EU presence on the island (EU Office in Nuuk since 2024).

Recent milestones:

- 1982: Referendum in GL on the EEC.
- 1985: GL withdraws from the EEC; OCT relationship begins.
- ...
- 2021-2027: €225m envelope for education and green growth.
- Nov 2023: EU–GL strategic partnership on sustainable raw materials value chains
- March 2024: European Commission office opens in Nuuk (inaugurated by President von der Leyen).
- Dec 2024: New 6-year protocol launched under the EU–GL Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (SFPA).

EU Arctic Forum, Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue and Arctic Youth Dialogue

- The EU's main event in, on and for the Arctic
- Alternating between Brussels and Arctic locations (1-3 Sept 2026 BRU)
- Focus on engagement, co-creation, listening and learning
- Bringing the Arctic to the EU, and the EU to the Arctic
- Very strong youth and indigenous presence

2025 video:

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7370682342237057024/>



Flagship projects: AURC and AYD

Arctic Urban Regional Cooperation (AURC)

- First-of-a-kind urban cooperation network
- Launched in 2024
- Closely working with Arctic Mayors' Forum
- 2 cities in Alaska, 1 city in Canada (out of 14-15)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INA7a1J580o>

Arctic Youth Dialogue

- A youth initiative under the EU Arctic policy (2023)
- A segment of the EU Arctic Forum (since 2023)
- A project implemented under *Youth Together*, led by WWF (2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-Prk>



Copernicus' Arctic Hub

#EUSpace

About News & Events Contact



PROGRAMME OF THE
EUROPEAN UNION



ARCTIC HUB

Data & Viewer

Use Cases

ARCTIC HUB

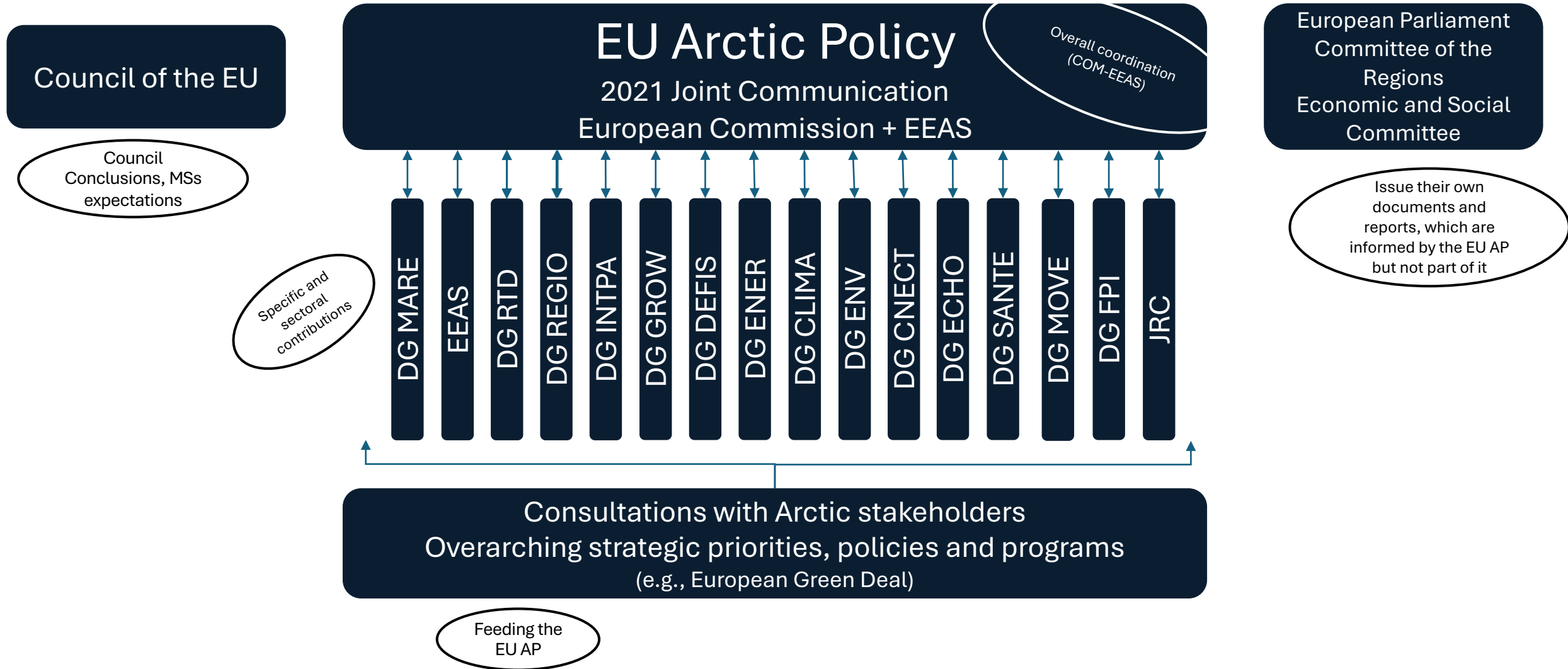
The Copernicus Arctic Hub provides access to data and information in the Arctic. Explore interactive maps and thematic use cases and empower decision-making and sustainable practices.

<https://www.arctic.hub.copernicus.eu/>

EU policymaking in action

Through the lens of the EU Arctic policy

The EU Arctic Policy: who does what?



Examples of daily work: DG MARE

- Coordination (and now update) of the EU Arctic policy
- Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (EU represents 27 MSs)
- Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (e.g., NEAFC), sustainable fisheries matters with Iceland, Norway, and Greenland
- International processes (e.g., BBNJ, UN)
- Grants and calls, including support to the Sámi Council
- Organization and management of the EU Arctic Forum, Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue, and Arctic Youth Dialogue
- Coordination of Arctic Youth Dialogue workstreams
- Participation in Arctic events, conferences, etc.
- Plus... research project on the Arctic blue economy, hosted by UW

Take home messages

Main takeaways

- The EU is both **internal** and **external** to the Arctic – we have skin in the game
 - The EU has a **people-first approach**, including towards **Indigenous Peoples**
 - Hundreds of thousands of people living in the Arctic are **EU citizens**
 - Undeniable **footprint** (economic, regulatory, scientific, political, environmental)
 - EU's actions in the Arctic are framed by its **competences**
- The Arctic has a **strong governance** system in place, if under stress
- Arctic **geopolitics** reflect global patterns and larger developments
 - The Arctic is also a theater where **global powers** meet
 - Geopolitics in the Arctic cannot be understood without **geoeconomics**
 - **Security** must be understood as **comprehensive**

The EU's Arctic geopolitical trilemma

- Environmental + economic ambitions, yet framed by EU competences (more impactful in the European Arctic)
- Strong economic and regulatory footprint, sectoral governance presence (eg, CAOFA) – but again, framed by EU competences
- Strong scientific, cultural, societal presence, including of EU citizens and EU Arctic regions and MSs territories – also framed by competences

The EU is closer to Portland than it looks

- **Alaska is in the EU-funded Arctic Urban Regional Cooperation**

The Arctic Urban Regional Cooperation (AURC) launched by the EU in 2024 includes Utqiagvik and the Fairbanks North Star Borough, two Alaskan municipalities. The EU's flagship urban Arctic cooperation network reaches into the US.

- **US researchers are EU partners**

Horizon Europe Arctic projects include US institutions: POLARIN, the EU polar research infrastructure network, lists the University of Alaska Fairbanks and UIC Science (Iñupiat-led, Utqiagvik) as partners.

Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility connects PCC, PSU, and UW with European Arctic universities.

Questions, comments?