

# INJECTING THE OBJECTIVES OF THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL INTO THE EU'S ARCTIC STRATEGY

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**Zsanett Gréta Papp**

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As the previous blog posts highlighted, the Arctic has received considerable attention over the last decade due to climate change, economic opportunities, and the increasing military presence in the region. As a consequence of this tendency shifts in the Arctic security dynamics. What is the future role of the EU in this changing geopolitical environment?

Looking at history, the EU's role was always significant; however, less geopolitical and always more concerned with two dimensions: geo-economic awareness and financial support ([link](#)). It is true that the EU has several ties to the region and is one of the main beneficiaries of the resources and goods deriving from the Arctic region. The European Commission only started to focus more on the region in 2008, but the EU's role was not tangible at this stage it was minimized seeking to promote stability in the region.

Even though, it seemed to be enough for years, more precisely until 2016 the first Arctic Strategy of the EU ([link](#)). Currently, while the region is facing all transformations that have changed the security dynamics, the EU had to re-invent its role in the region. The Arctic is emerging as a key region not only for global security but for the EU, as well. Therefore, in the recent [Arctic Strategy launched in 2021](#), the European Commission already declares the priority to understanding the complexities of the High North and its implication for Europe's security.

To be more precise, the Arctic region is thus regarded as a region with key strategic importance due to climate change, raw materials and geostrategic influence. There is an obvious development of the EU's Arctic Strategy compared with the first one launched in 2016, mainly regarding the EU's active engagement within both internal and external affairs of the region. The most crucial political actor is the European Commission in this case. It is trying to develop a more solid Arctic narrative, reflecting on both environmental and human security issues, leading the narrative that moving to a stronger EU policy is a geopolitical necessity.

As Arctic affairs are becoming ever more geopolitically important, and the security issues and rivalries are growing, as is the need for cooperation and multilateral agreements. The European Arctic, especially, faces the greatest security challenges. Despite significant losses in its war on Ukraine, Russia has continued expanding its military bases and started testing submarine missiles in the Barents Sea to penetrate NATO's already existing defence systems by developing further the Northern Sea Route. The EU, therefore, is committed to cooperating in strengthening the NATO presence in the region, supporting the NATO accession of Sweden and Finland. As [NATO and the EU have stood united](#) in support of Ukraine, the alliance's northern flank is supposed to further strengthen military ties across the North Atlantic.

In this context, the EU is willing to collaborate also with Norway, the US and Canada, which is already [stated](#) in the Strategic Compass, an ambitious plan of action for strengthening the EU's security and defence policy by 2030. NATO's recent plan is to build a new unit in Northern Sweden in Narvik. The Joint Force Command Norfolk – with the military presence in upper Norrland – will probably be strengthened with the establishment of a unit in Kalixfors in Kiruna municipality. The EU also has close ties with the Port of Narvik, as is a critical infrastructural area, more precisely, it gives a place for an iron ore terminal from which the raw materials are shipped out to the European market. As an Arctic hub, Narvik is a geo-economically important location, with the railway, road, sea and airport, which makes the Port of Narvik a natural logistics intersection being more closed to EU and NATO members.

It is already quite visible that the EU is more interested in safeguarding both its economic and soft power in the High North by collaborating more with the Arctic states and Greenland. In January 2023, the Swedish EU presidency of the Council chose Kiruna, for instance, to host the first major meeting thanks to its historical geostrategic importance and [green industrialization](#). It is one of the largest

suppliers of iron ore to Port of Narvik by train. The Kiruna-based company accounts for 90 percent of the entire iron ore production in Europe. The iron ore in northern Sweden has the highest concentration in the world. The Esrange Space Centre in Sweden has also become the winning candidate for Europe's first satellite launch, which would directly reach space from mainland Europe.

The Arctic is also the region where the potential of green energy and natural resources could become a key source of Europe's strategic autonomy. The European Commission, for instance, is opening an office in Greenland to work closely with the autonomous island. Greenland is aiming to be an exporter of hydropower and mining rare earth elements which would support the technology for the green transition. The EU is willing to financially contribute to driving the green transition in the Arctic. As the EU has realized that the sustainable use of resources can also become key to European strategic autonomy, the EU's geoeconomic awareness has already been stated under the Green Deal. As a result, the European Green Deal, with its set of legislative proposals, is at the heart of the EU's recent Arctic full-scale engagement, together with the EU's new approach to a sustainable blue economy, supported through science, innovation and regional investment. The EU's recent Arctic policy is also strengthening its soft power as a tool by raising Arctic matters in its external contacts, intensifying regional cooperation and monitoring and anticipating emerging security challenges.

The EU, nonetheless, is emerging as the climate and sustainability leader in the Arctic, which could finally take part in reshaping the Arctic governance. On the other hand, in addition to the Russian military build-up, the Chinese economic interests could also possibly threaten the EU's large engagement. Even though, PRC is much more cautious when it comes to Arctic involvement. Some may concern that the close relations of the [Nordic countries with the PRC](#) might call into question the cohesion and strategic autonomy of the EU. It could be difficult

for European companies to compete with Chinese state-owned enterprises receiving numerous grants for strategically important infrastructure projects. In this context, PRC [risks compromising the environmental and social standards](#) which is at the core of the EU's soft power.

As a consequence, the relations between the EU and the three other countries which border the Arctic (the United States, Canada and Norway) are of immense strategic importance. Recently the EU has joined member states and key partners, Norway, and Iceland in suspending Russia and Belarus from the activities of various regional cooperation frameworks in response to Russia's unprecedented military aggression against Ukraine and the involvement of Belarus in the joint partnership that the EU used to prove its stabilizing role and leadership.

Also, as the main consequence of the huge need of replacing the embargoed Russian fossil fuels, Norway dialled them up, and the close partner of the EU is now Europe's main supplier of fossil fuels. Norway is also feeding greater quantities of oil to its neighbours.

Injecting the European Green Deal's objectives into the Arctic strategy means the European Commission is trying to capture the trade-off between environmental protection and economic prospects to develop a tangible Arctic narrative. Although there is a more direct path regarding the region, there is still no common approach coming from EU institutions and member states. On the other hand, as a consequence of the EU-Norway energy partnership, the economic benefits might push the EU member states to regard the Arctic as the key region of the EU's external actions.

Although the Arctic will be emerging as a new deterrence area, the EU should remain concerned with two dimensions, geo-economic awareness and financial support. As the Commission has proclaimed climate change as a core priority, a comprehensive and long-term Arctic Policy based on sustainable EU-Arctic nexus,

therefore, could serve as a testing ground for a common European Foreign Policy, if its strategies have long-term credibility made possible by a solid community base and investment.