Brussels, 20 November 2008.

The Arctic merits the European Union's attention – first step towards an EU Arctic Policy

The European Commission today adopted a Communication on "The European Union and the Arctic Region" which highlights the effects of climate change and human activities in the Arctic. Apart from setting out EU interests and policy objectives, the text proposes a systematic and coordinated response to rapidly emerging challenges. Therefore the Communication is the first step towards an EU Arctic Policy and an important contribution to implementing the Integrated Maritime Policy for the EU.

Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, responsible for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, said: "*The Arctic is a unique and vulnerable region located in the immediate vicinity of Europe. Its evolution will have significant repercussions on the life of Europeans for generations to come Enhancing the European Union's contribution to Arctic cooperation will open new perspectives in our relations with the Arctic states. The EU is ready to work with them to increase stability, to enhance Arctic multilateral governance through the existing legal frameworks as well as to keep the right balance between the priority goal of preserving the environment and the need for sustainable use of natural resources including hydrocarbons.*"

Joe Borg, Commissioner in charge of the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries added: "*We cannot remain impassive in the face of the alarming developments affecting the Arctic climate and, in consequence, the rest of our planet. On the other hand, the combination of the climatic changes and the recent technological developments opens up new opportunities interlaced with challenges. As many EU policies in the areas such as climate change, environment, energy, research, fisheries and transport have a direct impact on the Arctic, a coordinated action is needed and the Integrated Maritime Policy can provide a much needed collaborative platform.*"

The Communication emphasises the close link between the European Union and the Arctic. EU policies of wider or global range have a direct bearing for the Arctic. The document provides a comprehensive review of EU interests in all areas of Arctic-related cooperation, and stresses that the developments in the Arctic require an integrated response.

Three main policy objectives are identified:

- Protecting and preserving the Arctic in unison with its population;
- Promoting sustainable use of resources;
- Contributing to enhanced Arctic multilateral governance.

To achieve these objectives, the Commission makes a number of proposals such as:

- The creation of new research infrastructure;
- Screening and monitoring of chemicals;
- Increased cooperation on prevention, preparedness and disaster response;
- Engagement of Arctic indigenous peoples in a regular dialogue;
- Extension of existing regulatory framework on fisheries to the Arctic;
- Improvement of maritime surveillance;
- Promoting full implementation of the existing rules and enhancing environmental and safety standards of the International Maritime Organisation;
- Enhancing Arctic multilateral governance, including a broad policy dialogue, on the basis of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea;
- Putting Arctic issues higher on the international agenda and increasing the European Commission's contribution to the work of the Arctic Council by becoming a permanent observer.

The development of an EU Arctic policy dovetails with the Integrated Maritime Policy for the EU, which aims to coordinate all EU policies with a maritime dimension to ensure environmental sustainability and the quality of living conditions in coastal regions while promoting the growth potential of maritime industries.

For more information:

MEMO/08/726

The Arctic thematic website:

http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/arctic_overview_en.html

The EU's relations with countries in the Arctic region:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/arctic_region/

The Northern Dimension Policy:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/north_dim