

Arctic continental shelf claims Mapping interests in the circumpolar North

SUMMARY

As climate change has led to record sea ice decline, the Arctic has resurfaced as a region of global geopolitical relevance. The visibility of Arctic issues has increased, with international attention zooming in on the Arctic Ocean and the North Pole.

The Arctic – one of the least populated areas on Earth – has been a peaceful and stable arena for growing intergovernmental and non-governmental cooperation since the end of the Cold War. However, potential competition for natural resources and new navigation routes has sharpened the focus on divisions between the states that have coasts on the Arctic Ocean.

Overlapping continental shelf claims, combined with Russia's increasing assertiveness, have sparked concern over potential new or rekindled disputes. The focus on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea – the international 'constitution for the oceans', which also regulates the Arctic Ocean – has increased accordingly.

At the same time, the importance of the Arctic as an element in national identities and narratives plays a key role in the discourse on national Arctic policies, which are aimed at both international and domestic audiences, thus linking geopolitics and emotions.



Arctic region countries and the North Pole.

In this briefing:

- Definition of key terms
- Climate change: Arctic potential and risks
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- Arctic ambitions: an overview
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Definitions of key terms

Arctic state: The Arctic region covers the area around the North Pole, north of the Arctic Circle (latitude 66 degrees, 32 minutes North), stretching across the continents of Asia, Europe and North America. Eight states have territories within the region and are thus defined as [Arctic states](#): Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States.

Coastal state: In order to claim maritime zones in the Arctic Ocean in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a state must have [coastal frontage](#) in the region. Five Arctic states – Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway, Russia and the US – are referred to as 'Arctic Ocean coastal states' in this briefing.¹

Continental shelf: Paragraphs 1 and 3 of [Article 76](#) to the UNCLOS define the term as follows:

'1. The continental shelf of a coastal State comprises the seabed and subsoil of the submarine areas that extend beyond its territorial sea throughout the natural prolongation of its land territory to the outer edge of the continental margin, or to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured where the outer edge of the continental margin does not extend up to that distance.'

'3. The continental margin comprises the submerged prolongation of the land mass of the coastal State, and consists of the seabed and subsoil of the shelf, the slope and the rise. It does not include the deep ocean floor with its oceanic ridges or the subsoil thereof.'

Climate change: Arctic potential and risks

The Arctic is warming twice as fast as elsewhere, with wide-reaching environmental, economic and security-related [consequences](#). One of the most visible effects is the rapid melting of the sea ice, with a [record](#) ice retreat in 2007 acting as a global wake-up call (a trend that was exacerbated in 2016, the [warmest year ever](#) in the Arctic). At the same time, the unexplored potential effects of the warming Arctic – hydrocarbons exploitation, mining, and open-water transport (notably the Northern Sea Route that would shorten shipping routes between northern Europe and north-east Asia by 40 % compared with the existing routes) – has fuelled geopolitical ambitions for the Arctic.

In August 2007, Russian Arctic explorers planted a Russian flag on the seabed, 4 200 metres below the North Pole. The significance of the flag may have been merely symbolic, but the heavily publicised move nevertheless mirrored Russia's geopolitical ambitions: Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov linked the flag-planting to his country's plans to claim that its territory reached up to the North Pole.² Russia's ['provocative action'](#) sparked a global [outcry](#): 'You can't go around the world and just plant flags and say "We're claiming this territory"', said the then Canadian Foreign Minister, Peter MacKay.

The spat propelled an international media narrative focusing on a ['scramble'](#) for Arctic resources. In the wake of this storm in the headlines, ministers from Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway, Russia and the US met in Ilulissat, Greenland, in May 2008 to sign a [declaration](#) that reaffirmed their sovereign rights and their commitment to 'the orderly settlement of any possible overlapping claims' on the basis of 'an extensive international legal framework' that applies to the Arctic Ocean, notably UNCLOS. In a pre-emptive [strike](#) against growing global interest in the Arctic, the 'Arctic Five' also noted that there is 'no need to develop a new comprehensive international legal regime to govern the Arctic Ocean.'³

UNCLOS: the 'constitution for the oceans'

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas ([UNCLOS](#)) is an international agreement that provides guidelines for how nations should use the world's seas and their natural resources. Opened for signature in 1982 and in force since 1994, the Convention aims to codify international law regarding territorial waters, sea-lanes, and ocean resources. It also contains mechanisms for resolving disputes in a peaceful manner. As of September 2016, 168 countries and the European Union (1998) have [joined](#) the convention. Thus far, however, the [Senate](#) has hindered US ratification of UNCLOS.

According to UNCLOS, each country's sovereign territorial waters extend to a maximum of 12 nautical miles (22 km). Every coastal country may establish an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) extending 200 nautical miles (370 km) from shore. UNCLOS allows states to extend their limits beyond 200 miles if they can provide scientific evidence that the continental shelf beyond their coastline extends that far. Upon ratification of UNCLOS, a country has a ten-year period to make claims to an extended continental shelf, by collecting and analysing data on the depth, shape, and geophysical characteristics of the seabed and sub-sea floor. If validated, the country receives exclusive rights to resources on or below the seabed of the relevant area.

Norway, Russia, Canada, and Denmark have all conducted scientific projects to provide a basis for seabed claims on extended continental shelves beyond their exclusive economic zones, and have subsequently submitted claims (see timeline) to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), created by the UNCLOS. As the US has not ratified UNCLOS, it cannot submit claims to the CLCS. The CLCS review of the claims is expected to take years.

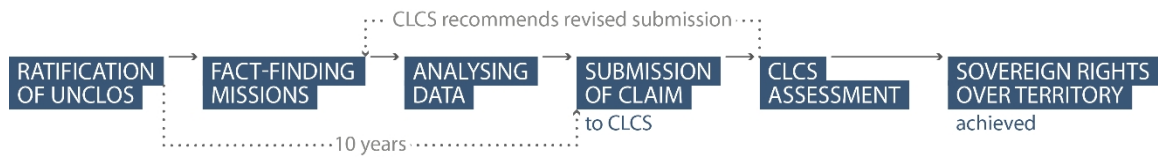
The status of some territories in the Arctic sea region is disputed for various reasons. [Hans Island](#) has been disputed since the early 1970s, when both Canada and Denmark claimed that the island – which is located in the middle of an international strait – is part of their respective territory. Whereas this is widely considered a [minor rift](#), [disagreements](#) over the legal [designation](#) of key Arctic shipping routes could become more controversial.

Arctic ambitions: an overview**Mapping national interests and narratives in an increasingly exposed environment**

The visibility and awareness of Arctic issues have increased in recent years, with attention zooming in on the Arctic Ocean and the North Pole as the object of territorial claims.⁴ The Arctic Ocean coastal states have carried out extensive research for years, often in joint operations, to prepare their CLCS submissions. All Arctic states continue to emphasise that the Arctic is and should remain an area of peaceful cooperation.

Under its ice sheet, the Arctic Ocean has a complex topography of plains, ridges, elevations and abysses that are expected to play a key role in the settling of the territorial claims. Therefore, research programmes have concentrated heavily on these features.⁵ Although the US Geological Survey in 2008 released [estimates](#) that the Arctic could hold about 22 % of the world's undiscovered conventional oil and natural gas resources, extraction of these resources in the Arctic would be risky and expensive, and declining oil prices have made Arctic energy [exploration](#) even less promising.

Since the end of the Cold War, circumpolar cooperation has increased, both in multilateral bodies (the leading intergovernmental forum being the [Arctic Council](#)⁶) as well as by indigenous people's organisations and subnational governments. All five Arctic Ocean coastal states continuously emphasise the important role of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region. At the same time, the Arctic as an identity-building, emotive element in the national narratives plays a vital role in some countries' official Arctic policies aimed at both domestic and international audiences.

Figure 1: The legal path towards sovereignty

Source: ['The Right Arctic' website](#).

Canada: The Arctic as part of the 'Canadian soul'

[Canada](#) ratified UNCLOS in November 2003, and in December 2013⁷ filed a [submission](#) with the CLCS regarding its continental shelf in the Atlantic Ocean, as well as preliminary information concerning the outer limits of its continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean, declaring sovereignty over some 1.2 million square kilometres. Since then, Canada has continued to collect and analyse [scientific data](#) — most recently through a North Pole [expedition](#) in collaboration with Sweden from 5 August to 20 September 2016 – required to support its claim to sovereignty rights over additional seabed territory. Canada expects to submit its final Arctic continental shelf claim in [2018](#), including the Lomonosov and Alpha-Mendeleev Ridges, thus aiming to claim the seabed under the North Pole. Canada's [budget](#) for the Atlantic and Arctic submission is CA\$170.6 million from 2004/05-2020/21.

Canada had close military [links](#) with the US in the Arctic region during World War II, and this continental cooperation continued during the Cold War. In the 1990s, increasing environmental and social considerations – including the impact on Canada's indigenous peoples – led to growing inclusion of the country's 'First Nations', culminating in the foundation of the semi-autonomous territory of [Nunavut](#) in 1999. Securing international recognition 'for the full extent of Canada's extended continental shelf' is an [official priority](#) articulated in the country's 2009 [Northern Strategy](#) and its [Statement on Arctic Foreign Policy](#). Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy explicitly states that the Arctic is 'fundamental to Canada's national identity' and is 'embedded in Canadian history and culture, and in the Canadian soul'. Canada underlines that it envisions 'engaging with neighbours to seek to resolve boundary issues' and that it 'does not anticipate any military challenges in the Arctic and believes that the region is well managed through existing institutions, particularly the Arctic Council'.

Under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and US President Barack Obama, a new [partnership](#) in the changing Arctic, 'with Indigenous and Northern partnerships, and responsible, science-based leadership', was launched in March 2016. In December 2016, Trudeau and Obama jointly announced a [freeze](#) on new oil and gas drilling in their Arctic waters.

Denmark/Greenland: 'equal partners' seeking to dispel North Pole race 'myth'

The Kingdom of Denmark is considered an Arctic Ocean coastal state because Greenland (the world's largest island with [self-government](#)) is part of the Danish Realm. Denmark/Greenland ratified UNCLOS in 2004. Since 2006, six larger-scale data acquisition projects have been conducted in the area north of Greenland, most of them in cooperation with Canada and Sweden.

On 15 December 2014, Denmark/Greenland filed a [submission](#) to define the outer limits of its continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean with the CLCS. The area consists of approximately 895 541 square kilometres beyond 200 nautical miles from the coast of Greenland. In June 2012, the Kingdom of Denmark presented a partial submission regarding the area south of Greenland, and in November 2013 a partial submission regarding the area north-east of Greenland. The [website](#) of Denmark's Continental Shelf

Project states that negotiations on overlaps with other Arctic Ocean coastal states will take place in accordance with the rules of UNCLOS 'as laid down in the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008'. The first discussions are not expected until [2020](#), and a resolution not until [2027](#). In September 2016, Denmark rejected Russia's [calls](#) for direct bilateral negotiations over the overlapping territorial claims, citing the need to 'apply the international rules'.

[The Kingdom of Denmark's Arctic Strategy 2011-2020](#) emphasises the 'equal partnership between the three parts of the Danish Realm': Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The strategy recalls the Ilulissat declaration's 'strong political signal' that the five Arctic Ocean coastal states have a 'political commitment to resolving disputes and overlapping claims through negotiation', thus 'hopefully once and for all dispelling the myth of a race to the North Pole.' The chapter on 'A Peaceful, Secure and Safe Arctic' underlines the goals of resolving maritime boundary disputes in accordance with international law, particularly UNCLOS. It also prioritises enforcing sovereignty 'by the armed forces through a visible presence in the region where surveillance is central' and emphasises that its area in the Arctic is 'covered by the [NATO](#) treaty Article 5 regarding collective defence'.⁸

New research plans spark calls for a separate Greenlandic strategy

The Arctic has slowly but surely gained visibility as an increasingly important part of the Danish/Greenlandic narrative (in which Greenland's role has evolved over time to that of an 'equal partner' in the Danish Realm).⁹ Arctic research is – as in the other Arctic Ocean coastal states – a central part of this narrative. Reflecting this, Denmark on 1 November 2016 unveiled a new research [strategy](#) (as part of the implementation of the Arctic Strategy 2011-2020) to help 'Denmark's global reputation as one of the world's leading countries in the area of Arctic research and education'. Among the strategy's proposals is the potential establishment of a research hub in Greenland. The new strategy sparked Greenlandic [calls](#) for a separate Greenlandic Arctic strategy focused on administrative areas over which the [Government in Greenland](#), in accordance with the 2009 [Self-Government Act](#), has assumed responsibility (education and research policies, for example, are Nuuk's responsibility, whereas Copenhagen remains responsible for foreign, defence and security policy).

Norway: 'standing firm' together with its allies following Ukraine

Norway ratified UNCLOS on 24 June 2006. On 27 November 2006, Norway submitted an extended continental shelf claim to the CLCS as the second Arctic Ocean coastal nation after Russia (see below). The claim extends the Norwegian seabed beyond the 200-nautical-mile EEZ in three areas of the north-eastern Atlantic and the Arctic: the 'Loop Hole' in the Barents Sea, the Western Nansen Basin in the Arctic Ocean, and the Banana Hole' in the Norwegian Sea. In March 2009, Norway received recommendations from the CLCS on its 2006 submission, advising that Norway and Russia pursue individual agreements. Norway and Russia ratified a Treaty on Maritime Delimitation in the Barents Sea in 2011, ending a 40-year dispute. There are, however, still unresolved questions over the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard; Norway and Russia disagree on whether equal treatment rights guaranteed by the 1920 [Svalbard Treaty](#) apply to maritime zones. The maritime [boundary](#) between the outer continental shelves of Svalbard and Greenland also remains unresolved.

Norway's government released its [High North Strategy](#) in December 2006 and adopted the slogan '[High North, low tension](#)', which still characterises Oslo's approach to the region, including neighbouring Russia. The main policy priorities in the 2006 strategy

include exercising authority in the 'High North' (focusing mainly on the Barents Sea, partly in view of the above-mentioned then-unresolved territorial disputes with Russia) in a consistent and predictable way and strengthening cooperation with Russia.

Norway broadens its 'High North' horizon and shows Russia a firmer side after Ukraine

The 2009 follow-up, [New building blocks in the North](#), emphasises Norway's role as a 'responsible and significant actor in the High North', broadening the scope of the concept of the 'High North' to become synonymous with 'the circumpolar Arctic'. The document stresses that 'NATO is present and must continue to be present in the High North, where the main task of the organisation is to help in maintaining stability and predictability and to preserve the low level of tension that has traditionally characterised the region'. It also highlights the EU's 'major contribution through its extensive funding schemes'. The 2014 government report, [Norway's Arctic policy](#), emphasises the 'vital' Barents cooperation, including with Russia. However, it now stresses that 'together with the rest of Europe and our other allies, we are standing firm in defence of international law and international rules in the face of Russia's conduct in Ukraine. This approach is also important in the context of the Arctic'. It also emphasises the 'important' NATO presence in Norway.

Russia: re-imagining the Arctic

Russia ratified UNCLOS on 12 March 1997 and has since then worked to expand its territory in the Arctic by adding 1.2 million square kilometres, reaching up to the North Pole. Russia (the only non-NATO Arctic Ocean coastal state) was the [first nation](#) to submit its extended continental shelf [claim](#) to nearly half of the Arctic Ocean, including the Lomonosov and Mendeleev Ridges, in 2001.¹⁰

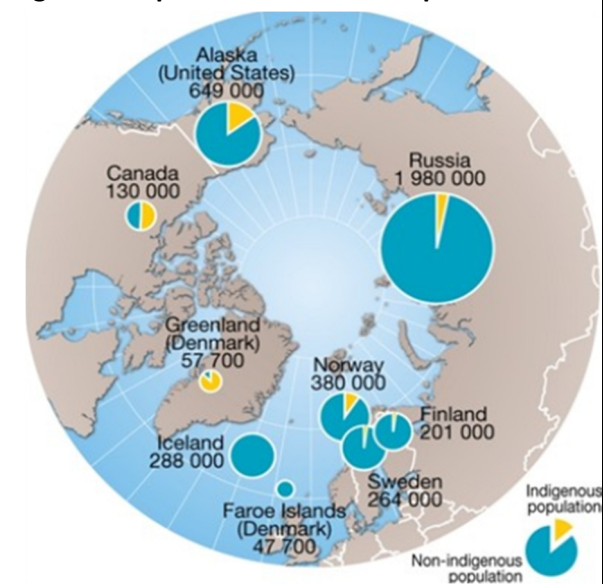
The CLCS noted that the claim lacked geological evidence and recommended that Russia re-submit a revised claim in respect of its extended continental shelf in the area.¹¹ The [US\\$60 million](#) 2007 Arktika expedition, during which researchers planted a Russian flag on the North Pole seabed, was part of these efforts. Russia submitted a revised [claim](#) in August 2015, extended to the Mendeleev elevation, in February 2016 it added the Chukchi high plain to its claims, and finally presented its revised claims to the CLCS in August 2016. Part of Russia's claim overlaps with Denmark's, which has not yet received recommendations from the UN. There could also be potential overlaps with Canadian claims. So far, Ottawa has only submitted a partial application (see above). Russia [expects](#) a recommendation from the CLCS in 2017 on its continental shelf claims.

New Arctic posturing and the Ukraine backlash

Russia dominates the Arctic geographically, by controlling about [half](#) of the Arctic coastline. Approximately 2 million inhabitants of the total [population](#) of some 4 million in the Arctic region live in Arctic Russia, which also hosts the largest Arctic city of Murmansk with its 300 000 inhabitants. However, Russia's Arctic population has been in steady decline since the break-up of the Soviet Union.¹²

The Soviet-era focus on the Arctic faded under Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s. However, the Kremlin has rekindled its attention to the region since 2000, primarily due to interest in

Figure 2: Population in the circumpolar Arctic



Source: [UNEP/Grid-Arendal](#).

potential natural resources¹³ and maritime transport (not least the increasing traffic along Russia's [Northern Sea Route](#)), which could help Russia improve its troubled [economy](#). The [Strategy](#) for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (adopted in 2013) emphasises [improving](#) geological prospection of the continental shelf, implementing large-scale resource projects as well as upgrading infrastructure related to transport and resource development.

Since Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula in March 2014 amplified the Ukraine crisis in March 2014, Moscow has stepped up its [military activities](#) in the Arctic (including military [drills](#), opening or reopening a number of Arctic [military bases](#) and the June 2016 unveiling of a new naval [icebreaker](#) as the first of a series of icebreakers ordered by the defence ministry). Russia's 2015 military doctrine listed 'maintaining Russia's national interests in the Arctic' among its main goals. However, Moscow's Arctic power display has not dampened [concerns](#) that sinking hydrocarbon prices and the repercussions of the Ukraine crisis (economic [sanctions](#) and Western downsizing of Arctic projects in Russia) are hampering Russian Arctic investments and research, affecting socioeconomic developments in the region.

The United States: pressure for ratification of UNCLOS

The US has not ratified UNCLOS and thus does not have a set time limit to file territorial claims. UNCLOS has been [contentious](#) in the US since Republicans rejected it under President Ronald Reagan, primarily for imposing UN bureaucracy over US activities such as seabed mining. While [opponents](#) claim that the treaty interferes with US military and intelligence activities, there are increasing [calls](#) from various sides (Democrats, national [security staff](#) from the George W. Bush administration, and top military leaders) for ratification. They argue that the Senate 'should take steps to do what the past three presidents, the US Navy, and the US Coast Guard have long requested: to ratify UNCLOS and to protect US interests by ensuring that the United States is a full and participating party to this important international agreement.'

The 2009 US [Arctic Region Policy](#) sets out – compared with a similar document from 1994 – an increased [focus](#) on the region. The document states that the Senate should accede to the UNCLOS 'to protect and advance US interests.' In its September 2016 [Report on Arctic Policy](#), the State Department's International Security Advisory Board (ISAB) calls for a continuing US leadership role on Arctic issues in the face of concerns about 'Russian interests, policies and activities' in the regions. ISAB also urges the US government to pay more attention to the impact of China's investments and activities in the Arctic, notably in Iceland and Greenland, on regional security.

It remains to be seen what the [presidency](#) of Donald Trump will mean for the Arctic. His new Secretary of State will complete the US's two years in the chair of the Arctic Council before it passes to Finland in spring 2017. Trump stated repeatedly during the campaign that he does not believe in climate change and has vowed to withdraw from the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) and scrap Barack Obama's [Climate Action Plan](#). He has said that he will encourage offshore Arctic oil drilling and move the ballistic missile defence system (including anti-ballistic missile radar and communications system in the Arctic) forward. Amid [concern](#) over a potential future policy shift, President Barack Obama on 20 December 2016 indefinitely [banned](#) new offshore oil and gas licensing in most of the US Arctic waters and parts of the Atlantic Ocean. The move was coordinated with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who also put a [moratorium](#) on new oil and gas leasing in Canada's Arctic waters.

The EU's Arctic Strategy

The EU's learning curve reflects improved understanding of a heterogeneous region

Three EU Member States (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) and two other European Economic Area members (Iceland and Norway) are Arctic states. Hence the EU has a strategic interest in stability in the region. Reflecting the rapid changes in the Arctic, the EU's Arctic policy has developed significantly in recent years. The EU has pushed the [Northern Dimension](#) policy – a joint policy between the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland – since 1999 (renewed in 2006). Denmark, Finland and Sweden are AC members, while seven EU Member States (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom and Italy) are observers. The EU supports peaceful Arctic cooperation through multiple mechanisms, and aims to play a constructive [role](#) in the Arctic.

A number of issues have contributed to the EU's learning curve regarding the complex dynamics of the region. For example, the dispute with Canada over the import ban on seal products resulted in Canada blocking the EU's 2008 application for observer status in the Arctic Council. At the 2013 AC ministerial meeting (at which China, Japan, India, Korea and Singapore all obtained [observer status](#)), the EU bid was again formally rejected. However, the EU did obtain the [assurance](#) that it would be invited to attend all AC meetings without a prior invitation. The EU-Canada dispute was resolved in 2014, and Ottawa lifted its veto at the 2015 AC ministerial meeting. However, [Russia](#) then blocked the EU's bid. The US will host the next AC ministerial meeting in 2017 in Alaska.

2016 communication, 'An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic'

In April 2016, the Commission and the High Representative/VP presented a joint communication on '[An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic](#)'. It builds upon the EU activities and instruments that were developed after the [2008](#) Communication 'The European Union and the Arctic region' and its [2012](#) update. The 2016 policy aims to boost the EU's role in the Arctic and proposes further development of EU Arctic policy in three key areas: supporting research to address environmental and climate change in the Arctic; supporting sustainable use of resources and environmental expertise; and increasing constructive engagement with Arctic states and indigenous peoples.

In the 2016 document, the area of international cooperation has – in addition to the focus on environmental and marine protection, safety at sea and sustainable management of resources (as in the 2008 and 2012 documents) – increased the emphasis on climate change (building on COP 21), fisheries management (including a call for a new regional fisheries management organisation or arrangement) and scientific cooperation. Other differences compared to the previous communications mirror the changing international relations since 2008, such as the 2014 [EU-Greenland Partnership](#), changed ties to [Iceland](#) (which applied for EU membership in 2009 but dropped its bid in 2015) and the crisis with Russia. The 2016 communication omits the Arctic territorial disputes mentioned in the 2008 document and only refers to Russia in very general terms, listing the country along with the other Arctic states, unlike the 2012 communication that dedicated a separate [annex](#) to EU-Russia energy projects.

In its 20 June 2016 [conclusions](#) on the Arctic, the Council – noting the increased global attention and activity in the Arctic region – emphasised the importance from a foreign and security policy perspective of reinforcing the EU's engagement in the Arctic.

Whereas the 2016 communication omits security aspects, the June 2016 [Global Strategy for the EU Foreign and Security Policy](#) covers security-related aspects in the Arctic. It

states that the EU will contribute to the Arctic remaining a 'low-tension area' with ongoing cooperation ensured by the Arctic Council and a 'well-functioning legal framework'. The EU contribution will focus on climate action and environmental research, sustainable development, telecommunications, search and rescue, as well as cooperation with Arctic states, institutions, indigenous peoples and local communities.

What is the European Parliament doing?

An active player in the Arctic arena

The European Parliament's [2008](#), [2011](#) and [2014](#) resolutions on the Arctic form part of the basis of the EU's Arctic policy, together with the 2008, 2012 and 2016 Commission/EEAS communications, and Council conclusions (2009). In 2014, Parliament and the Council requested a new joint EEAS/Commission Arctic communication, resulting in the 2016 communication.

The EP has not yet adopted a resolution on the 2016 communication. A [draft report](#) (Committee on Foreign Affairs and Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, joint rapporteurs: Urmas Paet, ALDE, Estonia, and Sirpa Pietikäinen, EPP, Finland) is planned to come to plenary in March 2017. The draft report calls for improved coordination between the EU, the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and other bodies involved in cooperation in the High North. The draft report also reconfirms its support for observer status of the EU in the Arctic Council and suggests 'further enhancing coordination between the Commission and the EEAS on Arctic issues.

The EP is a founding member of the Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians ([CPAR](#)), a parliamentary body comprising delegations from the national parliaments of the Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, US) and the EP. The conference also includes Permanent Participants representing indigenous peoples. The first Parliamentary Conference concerning Arctic cooperation was held in Reykjavik, Iceland in 1993. One of the main priorities of the Standing Committee was originally to support the establishment of the Arctic Council.

The Delegation for relations to Switzerland, Norway and Iceland / EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee ([SINEEA](#)) is responsible for the EP's relations with all North and High North multilateral assemblies, including the Nordic Council, the [West Nordic Council](#), the ND Parliamentary Forum, the Barents Parliamentary Conference, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference and the CPAR.

Main references

Powell, Richard C. and Dodds, Klaus, *Polar geopolitics? Knowledges, resources and legal regimes*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014.

Stang, Gerald, [EU Arctic policy in regional context](#), European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies, Policy Department, 6 July 2016.

Steinberg, Philip E. et al, *Contesting the Arctic: politics and imaginaries in the circumpolar North*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2015.

Endnotes

- ¹ 'Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States have coastal frontage on the Arctic Ocean and thus are considered as coastal states which can exert legislative and enforcement control over foreign ships in offshore waters'. Loukacheva, [Polar Law Textbook](#), Nordic Council of Ministers, 2010, p. 49.
- ² Steinberg et al (2015), p. 20.
- ³ The Ilulissat meeting and a later 'Arctic Five' ministerial [meeting](#) held in in 2010 led to tensions with other Arctic Council Member States (Iceland, Finland and Sweden) and indigenous groups, who felt that they were unnecessarily

being excluded from discussions of relevance to their interests and were unhappy that the Declaration 'appeared to relegate them to the status of "other users" in the context of the Arctic Ocean'. It also challenged the role of the Arctic Council, a circumpolar body whose role as a coordinating Arctic structure has grown over recent years. The term 'Arctic coastal state' became somewhat contentious after the Ilulissat declaration. Iceland's 2011 Arctic strategy includes 'securing Iceland's position as a coastal State within the Arctic region as regards influencing its development as well as international decisions on regional issues on the basis of legal, economic, ecological and geographical arguments'. Iceland argues that, since its EEZ falls within the Arctic and extends to the Greenland Sea adjoining the Arctic Ocean, it has 'both territory and rights to sea areas north of the Arctic Circle'. The Ilulissat Declaration seems to have been the trigger for Iceland's calls to be recognised as a 'coastal state'. Klaus Dodds and Valur Ingimundarson [point out](#) that 'when Iceland held the chair of the Arctic Council (2002-2004) there was no discussion of the "coastal state" because Icelandic officials were not, at that point, concerned with the definition'.

- ⁴ Dodds and Ingimundarson (2012).
- ⁵ Brekke, Harald in Powell & Dodds (2014), p. 41.
- ⁶ The 1996 [Ottawa Declaration](#) lists Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the US as Member States. In addition, six organisations representing Arctic indigenous peoples have status as Permanent Participants. See also the [Arctic Yearbook 2016](#).
- ⁷ Although Annex II of UNCLOS, Article 4, provides that coastal states must make submissions to the CLCS within 10 years of ratification, there is no sanction for failing to meet the deadline, and a number of states have done so. See Norman A. Martínez Gutiérrez: *The IMLI Manual on International Maritime Law: Volume I: The Law of the Sea*, 2014.
- ⁸ There is [no common](#) NATO position on its role in the Arctic region. The alliance's 2010 Strategic Concept did not mention the word Arctic. Neither did the 2014 Wales Summit Declaration nor the 2016 Warsaw Summit Communiqué.
- ⁹ The number of Danish news headlines mentioning the Danish Realm increased fivefold from 2009 to 2012, according to Breum, Martin, *Når isen forsvinder: Danmark som stormagt i Arktis, Grønlands rigdomme og kampen om Nordpolen*, Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 2013, p. 13.
- ¹⁰ Responding to Russia's 2001 claim, the US argued that the Lomonosov Ridge 'is a freestanding feature in the deep, oceanic part of the Arctic Ocean Basin, and not a natural component of the continental shelf of either Russia or any other State'.
- ¹¹ Brekke, Harald in Powell & Dodds (2014), p. 45.
- ¹² Due to economic reforms and liberalised prices following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the market cost of living in the northern periphery became evident. The year of the greatest out-migration was 1992, the first year of the economic reforms. Heleniak, Timothy: [Boom and Bust: Population Change in Russia's Arctic Cities](#) (2013).
- ¹³ According to the US [National Petroleum Council](#) (2015), Russia holds 58 % of the Arctic's undiscovered petroleum resources, and the US Geological Survey estimates that the [Lomonosov Ridge](#) could hold an additional 1.1 billion barrels of technically recoverable undiscovered oil and 7.16 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The estimated amounts seem impressive, but are [deemed](#) relatively modest compared with the resources in Russia's existing Arctic zone.

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Annex 1: Map of Arctic claims

Competing claims

Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway and Russia have all submitted Arctic Ocean territorial claims to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark and Russia have all announced that the Lomonosov Ridge – a 1 800 km-long underwater mountain range that reaches the

North Pole and divides the Arctic in the Eurasia Basin and the Amerasia Basin – is an extension of their respective territory. With sovereign rights over the territory, the claimant state would gain exclusive rights to the sea bottom and resources below.

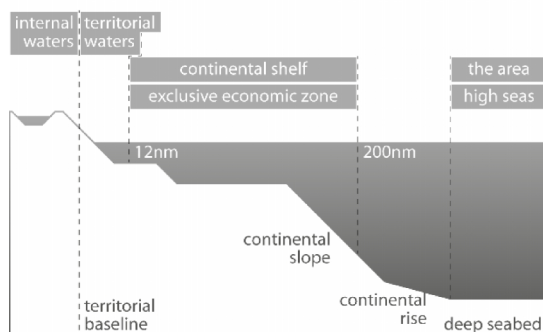
Exclusive economic zones

EEZs extend from the edge of the territorial sea out to 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres; 230 miles) from the baseline. Within this area, the coastal State has sole exploitation rights over all natural resources.



The continental shelf

is, according to UNCLOS, the natural prolongation of the land territory to the outer edge of the continental margin, or to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured where the outer edge of the continental margin does not extend up to that distance.



Melting Arctic Sea ice

The dark area shows the Arctic sea ice extent in September 2016 (averaging 4.72 million square kilometres, the fifth lowest in the satellite record). The lighter grey area shows the Arctic sea ice in 1979.



Annex 2: Timeline of Arctic territorial claims and related developments

10/5/1921	Denmark formally declares sovereignty over Greenland.
1/6/1925	Canada claims that its boundaries extend up to the North Pole.
15/4/1926	The USSR Arctic Decree declares all lands and islands between the USSR and North Pole to be USSR territory.
5/4/1933	Norway loses the dispute with Denmark over Eastern Greenland at the Permanent Court of International Justice.
28/9/1945	US Proclamation 2667 claims exclusive jurisdiction over its continental shelf resources.
17/12/1973	Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark sign and submit agreement to the UN on the delimitation of the continental shelf between Greenland and Canada. The decision over Hans Island, lying on both sides of the divide, is delayed.
10/12/1984	The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is signed and opened to ratification. To enter into force, UNCLOS requires 60 signatures.
10/12/1991	As the first Arctic coastal state, Russia submits its claim to 1.2 million square kilometres of territory, including the North Pole, to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS).
11/1/1993	Signing of the Declaration on Cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, founding the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council.
16/11/1994	UNCLOS enters into force one year after its 60th signature.
24/6/1996	Norway ratifies UNCLOS and can submit territorial claims to the CLCS.
19/9/1996	The Arctic Council is established with the Ottawa Declaration.
12/3/1997	Russia ratifies the UNCLOS and can submit territorial claims to the CLCS.
20/12/2001	As the first Arctic coastal state, Russia submits its claim to 1.2 million square kilometres of territory, including the North Pole, to the CLCS.
6/2002	The CLCS recommends additional research to support Russia's claim.
7/11/2003	Canada ratifies UNCLOS. Canada can submit territorial claims to the CLCS.
16/11/2004	Denmark ratifies UNCLOS and can submit territorial claims to the CLCS.
27/11/2006	Norway submits claim to the CLCS to clarify disputed territory in the Barents Sea, the Arctic Ocean, and the Norwegian Sea.
2/8/2007	Russian explorers plant a titanium Russian flag on the seabed 4 200 metres below the North Pole during the Arktika expedition.
14/9/2007	The European Space Agency reports that ice loss had opened up the Northwest Passage for the first time since records began in 1978.
0/2008	The US Geological Survey estimates that 22 % of the world's undiscovered conventional oil and natural gas resources may remain in the Arctic.
28/5/2008	Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the US sign the 'Ilulissat declaration', pledging to settle potential overlapping territorial claims within the UNCLOS.
27/3/2009	Reacting to Norway's 2009 bid, the CLCS recommends that Norway and Russia pursue individual agreements on disputes in the Barents Sea, Arctic Ocean, Norwegian and Greenland Seas.
1/2/2010	The US Department of Defense states that climate change in the Arctic is significant, urging UNCLOS ratification.
15/9/2010	Norway and Russia sign Treaty on Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean, ending 40 years of disputes.
6/12/2013	Canada submits a partial claim to the CLCS.
15/12/2014	Denmark/Greenland submits a partial submission to the CLCS, claiming that the Lomonosov Ridge is a continental extension of its landmass.
4/8/2015	Russia files a partial revised submission, asserting that the Lomonosov Ridge is a continental extension of the Russian landmass.
9/2/2016	Russia provides additional evidence for the adjusted bid to the Lomonosov Ridge, the Mendeleev Elevation, and the Chukchi high plain.