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Iceland's Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region

Parliamentary Resolution 25/151

Government of Iceland
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Foreword

Iceland is the only Arctic State that can be deemed to lie entirely within the Arctic as it is most commonly delimited. Consequently, Arctic affairs are a top priority in Iceland's foreign policy. There has been consensus on Iceland's Arctic policy across the political spectrum, and it is important that this continues. It was therefore natural that the renewal of the policy from 2011 would be done in broad consultation with all stakeholders. For this reason, I appointed a committee, with members nominated from all political parties represented in the Althingi, to prepare a proposal for a revised Arctic Policy. The committee, chaired by MP Bryndís Haraldsdóttir from the Independence Party, held wide consultations among Arctic stakeholders, institutions and academia and subsequently submitted a proposal for an updated policy. Their proposal became the basis of the parliamentary resolution on Iceland's Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region adopted on 19 May.



This revision and update was timely, considering the changes that have taken place in the Arctic environment, and the effects of climate change. Furthermore, there have been major developments in business practices and new

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opportunities have or are about to materialize, especially related to new and greener technologies in adapting to and fighting climate change in the Arctic region.

The Policy was revised during Iceland's chairmanship of the Arctic Council and was finalized on the eve of the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in Reykjavik held 20 May 2021.

It is my hope that our new Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region will strengthen Iceland's position and participation in Arctic cooperation, in concert with the Arctic Council's Reykjavik declaration and the Council's first Strategic plan, adopted at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting.

Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson

Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation

151st Legislative Assembly 2020-2021 – Item 750

Parliamentary Resolution 24/151 on **Iceland's Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region**

Althingi has resolved to entrust the government with following a Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region that is based on the following points of emphasis:

1. To actively participate in international cooperation on matters concerning the Arctic region, based on the values that have guided Icelandic foreign policy, including peace, democracy, human rights and equality.
2. To continue to support the Arctic Council and to promote it as the most important forum for consultation and cooperation on matters concerning the region.
3. To promote a peaceful resolution of disputes that may arise in the Arctic region, as well as respect for international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and international human rights treaties.
4. To make sustainable development a guiding principle, based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

5. To focus on countering climate change and responding to its negative effects in the Arctic region.
6. To put environmental protection first, including the protection of the biota and biodiversity of the Arctic region.
7. To safeguard health of the marine environment, including taking preventive action against the threats posed by ocean acidification and all kinds of ocean pollution.
8. To focus on reducing the use of fossil fuels in the Arctic region, including by ceasing the use of heavy fuel oil in shipping, improving access to renewable energy sources and supporting measures that ensure an energy transition.
9. To look to the welfare of the inhabitants of the Arctic region, including their opportunities to earn a living and their access to digital communications, education and health care services, to support the rights of Indigenous Peoples and equality for all, as well as efforts to protect the cultural heritage and languages of the Arctic peoples.
10. To utilise possible economic opportunities in the Arctic region with an eye to sustainability and responsible use of resources.
11. To further trade and cooperation on commerce, education and services in the Arctic region, especially

with Iceland's nearest neighbours in Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

- 12.** To work towards stronger monitoring and safer transport by sea and air, including by improved connectivity and a tighter network of satellite systems, e.g. for satellite navigation.
- 13.** To increase search and rescue capabilities, as well as response to accidental pollution incidents, e.g. by establishing a regional search and rescue cluster in Iceland, and further strengthening international cooperation.
- 14.** To guard security interests on a civil basis, grounded in the National Security Policy, thoroughly monitor security developments in cooperation with the other Nordic nations and our NATO allies, oppose militarisation and purposefully work towards maintaining peace and stability in the area.
- 15.** To look positively upon the growing interest in matters concerning the Arctic region from parties outside the region, provided that they respect international law and the status of the eight Arctic States and conduct themselves in a peaceful and sustainable manner.
- 16.** To bolster Iceland's standing and image as an Arctic State by developing local knowledge and expertise on matters concerning the Arctic, and to increase support for centres of education, science and discussion.

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- 17.** To support international scientific cooperation in the Arctic region and facilitate the dissemination of scientific findings, and to boost national research activities, including by forming an Arctic research programme.
- 18.** To build upon the success of the Arctic Circle and create a future framework for it by establishing a non-profit foundation that will operate an Arctic centre in Iceland.
- 19.** To further strengthen the position of Akureyri as the centre of Arctic matters in Iceland, including by supporting education and research bodies and knowledge centres and by strengthening local consultation and cooperation on matters concerning the Arctic region.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs shall, on the basis of this Resolution, form a plan on the implementation of the Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region in consultation with other concerned ministers, and shall inform Althingi of the implementation of the Policy after five years.

Approved at Althingi 19 May 2021.

Explanatory memorandum to the proposal for a parliamentary resolution

The Parliamentary Resolution is based on the proposals of a parliamentary committee appointed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation to revise Iceland's Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region. The minister and committee members introduced the committee's proposals on 19 March 2021[...].

The previous policy was based on Parliamentary Resolution No 20/139 that was adopted in March 2011, but in the decade since then the Arctic region has become ever more central in international discussions, especially because of the ongoing rapid environmental changes due to global warming. Additionally, Iceland has served an important role in international cooperation on matters concerning the region by chairing the Arctic Council in 2019-2021. Considering these developments, it was time to revise the Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region, and to that end, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation appointed a committee of nine parliamentarians consisting of members from all the parliamentary parties. The role of the committee was to discuss and make proposals for a revised Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region on a broad basis, including with an eye to ecology, economy, politics and security.

The committee's letter of proposals [...] reiterates that matters concerning the Arctic region fall under the auspices of several ministries and that active collaboration within the administration must be ensured. The committee also considers it advisable that Althingi be kept regularly informed of the implementation of the Policy. Therefore, this Proposal provides that the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation shall form a plan for the implementation of the Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region in collaboration with the other ministers concerned, and shall keep Althingi informed of the implementation of the Policy.

The committee was entrusted with defining the main premises to be used as a basis for Iceland's policy development on matters concerning the Arctic region, and the following chapter of the memorandum is based on that opinion of the committee.

Main Premises

Iceland is an Arctic State because it is one of eight states that have territories and exclusive economic zones north of the Arctic circle. The term 'Arctic region' does, however, have a wider meaning and can encompass a larger area within the Arctic States or their territories. There is no universal definition of the 'Arctic region', but according to commonly used criteria, Iceland lies mostly or completely within its boundaries, as does most of its exclusive economic zone. All the country's inhabitants can, under that definition, be called inhabitants of the Arctic region, which gives Iceland a special status as an Arctic State, alongside Greenland. It can also be stated that few states have as much interest in favourable developments in the area, including with regard to environmental, economic, political and security concerns. Matters concerning the Arctic region have rightfully been among Iceland's most important foreign policy points of emphasis in recent years. The Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region must focus on securing Iceland's broader interests.

International cooperation on matters concerning the Arctic region has been firmly established and is proceeding well. The Arctic Council is the most important forum for cooperation and consultation on matters concerning the region. Iceland stands on equal footing with the other seven

Arctic States and the representatives of the Indigenous Peoples of the region and participates actively in the Council's work. The member states take turns chairing the Council, with Iceland currently occupying the chairmanship for the second time. The chairmanship term began in the spring of 2019 and will end with a ministerial meeting in Reykjavik in May 2021. The Arctic Council is not a formal international organisation and does not set binding rules, but its strength is mainly based on its ability to connect science and policy. The activities of the Council's working groups and expert groups include monitoring, research and assessments of various foundations for sustainable development in the Arctic region, which result in recommendations that are intended to form a basis for political policy developments. The contribution of the working groups to increased knowledge of the environment, biota and communities in the Arctic region has been considerable. In three instances, the member states have made legally binding agreements on matters of common interest. These are the 2011 Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic (SAR), the 2013 Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (MOSPA), and the 2017 Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation. The Council's activities have also influenced the formation of rules and regulations within other international organisations

and were, for example, decisive in the negotiations for the Polar Code within the International Maritime Organisation.

The Polar Code, which entered into force in 2017, introduced special rules regarding vessels that navigate the seas within the polar regions, which aim at increasing security and environmental protection. Thirteen non-Arctic States currently have observer status in the Arctic Council, as well as more than twenty intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, which creates an ideal channel for consultation and cooperation with parties outside the region.

In addition to the Arctic Council, matters concerning the Arctic region are discussed in various other forums, including within the Barent Euro-Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, as well as other regional organisations and institutions that Iceland is a member of. Cooperation between national parliaments is also long-established. The Standing Committee of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region was established in 1994 and is the forum for collaboration between parliamentarians from the Arctic Council member states and serves as the management committee for the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, which is held every two years. The West Nordic Council has an even longer history, having been established

in 1985 as a cooperation forum for parliamentarians from Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Iceland needs to continue to actively participate in international cooperation on matters concerning the Arctic region based on the core values that have underpinned Icelandic foreign policy.

Relations between states in the Arctic must respect international law and any disputes that may arise must be peacefully resolved on the basis thereof. An adequate legal framework and institutional system are in place. The rules of the law of the sea apply to the northern maritime waters as well as all other maritime areas, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Seven of the Arctic States have ratified the Convention on the Law of the Sea, but the eighth state, the USA, backs the Convention without having ratified it. The Convention on the Law of the Sea extends to all maritime zones, as well as the air space above them and their seabed and subsoil. The Convention includes provisions on shipping, fishing, use of continental shelf resources, delimitation of maritime areas, pollution prevention, ocean research and dispute resolution. Coastal states can, on the basis of the Convention on the Law of the Sea and having fulfilled specific conditions, lay claim to areas of the continental shelf outside of their 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone. The continental shelf includes mineral resources such as oil, gas and metals, other inorganic seabed

resources, such as geothermal heat, and organisms living in the bottom sediment. Of the Arctic region's coastal states, Norway alone has already determined the outer boundary of its continental shelf based on the proposals of the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. Iceland, Denmark, Canada and Russia have been working on explanatory reports for the Commission, but the USA cannot submit a report until it has ratified the Convention on the Law of the Sea. Denmark (on behalf of Greenland), Canada and Russia all lay claim to the Lomonosov Ridge underneath the central part of the Northern Arctic Ocean and they may have to negotiate the boundaries of the continental shelf in that area. These states have promised that if their claims overlap, they will solve the dispute on the basis of international law. It is of utmost importance that they keep that promise.

Since the current Policy [approved 2011] on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region was adopted, the evidence for the seriousness of global climate change has become ever stronger. At the same time, the spotlight has been further focused on the special threat posed to the Arctic by global warming. Nowhere are the signs of climate change more in evidence. They include the retreat of glaciers, a decrease in pack ice, and the thawing of permafrost. Declining pack ice cover increases the heat uptake in Arctic waters, which

in turn accelerates rising sea and air temperatures. The temperatures in the Arctic region continue to rise at least twice as fast as the global average. Therefore, one of the most important tasks of the Arctic States is to slow climate change and respond to its consequences. This calls for broad international cooperation since the climate threat poses a challenge that is not confined by borders. Just as the raised temperatures in the Arctic region can be traced to global greenhouse gas emissions, the effects of the warming of the polar regions are felt globally, e.g. through rising sea levels.

An emphasis must be put on the countries of the world upholding their obligations under the Paris Agreement on climate change. There will probably be increasing pressure in the coming years for even stricter measures to be taken. Iceland has set itself clear objectives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the aim of the Action Plan on Climate Matters until 2030 is for Iceland to not only fulfil its international obligations but exceed them. The aim is for Iceland to be carbon neutral by 2040. All over the world, the use of fossil fuels must give way to renewable energy sources. Iceland is well-equipped in that respect and can share its knowledge and experience of harnessing both water and geothermal heat. All over the world, the harnessing of wind power has been growing rapidly since the turn of the century and new developments in the design of wind

turbines may increase the utilisation of wind energy in the Arctic region. The aim of Iceland's energy policy until 2050 is for the country to be a leader in sustainable energy production and energy transition.

The effects of warming and pollution in the Arctic region are wide-ranging and entail various threats to the balance of ecosystems and biodiversity on land and in the sea, which are often interacting. An obvious example of the effects of carbon emissions and warming of the climate is ocean acidification, which can seriously affect Iceland's interests. An increased volume of ocean carbon absorption lowers the pH of the sea, which directly threatens the living conditions of calcareous organisms, which are the basic food source for many commercially caught fish species. The sea in the Arctic region is believed to be more sensitive to acidification because cold sea water can absorb more carbon from the atmosphere than warm seawater. The absorption also increases as the pack ice cover is reduced. In order to stop ocean acidification and other negative effects on the environment and ecosystems of the Arctic region, it is necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions considerably. At the same time, monitoring and scientific research must be strengthened so that the best available knowledge is available for policy development and decision-making. This calls for a reinforcement of research infrastructure and international scientific cooperation.

The reduction of pack ice in the Arctic seas has formed expectations for the opening of shipping routes and access to various natural resources. It is difficult to predict how quickly and to what extent such expectations will be realised, but it is clear that this development brings both opportunities and challenges. For Iceland, there may be opportunities connected with cargo shipping in Arctic waters, services related to resource utilisation, and tourism development. An upcoming report from a working group that was appointed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation will map out economic opportunities in the Arctic region and set out proposals for action. Iceland needs to pay close attention to such opportunities and safeguard all related interests. At the same time, it is important to look at the risk factors inherent in vastly increased maritime traffic, exploitation of resources and other economic activities in the Arctic region. Environmental protection and sustainability must always be the guiding principles.

Iceland has emphasised responsible fisheries management and sustainable use of marine resources. In the eventuality that fishing will take place in the northernmost maritime waters, Iceland's interests must be safeguarded and care must be taken in this utilisation since the ecosystems in these areas are particularly vulnerable. The Agreement

to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean that Iceland, the USA, Denmark (on behalf of Greenland), Japan, Canada, China, Norway, Russia and South Korea signed in 2018 was an important step in this direction. Up to now, fishing in this area has been impossible due to pack ice, but climate change may create opportunities for high seas fishing in the coming years or decades. The Agreement is based on a precautionary approach, with the parties committing to not starting commercial fishing in the part of the Northern Arctic Ocean defined as high seas while there is scientific uncertainty as to whether such fishing can be conducted sustainably. The Agreement also creates a framework on how the next steps can be taken when scientific data supports starting fishing operations, taking into consideration the appropriate viewpoints of fisheries management and impacts on the ecosystem.

Increased maritime traffic in the Arctic Ocean calls for increased preparedness for search and rescue and responses to accidental pollution incidents. Cooperation between the Arctic States in this area has increased in recent years, including on the basis of the Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement and the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic, as well as through collaboration within the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, which was established in 2015. Iceland's search and rescue

area is 1.9 million square kilometres in size, more than twice the size of the Icelandic exclusive economic zone. Conditions in the search area can be very harsh. The 2016 report of the Minister of the Interior's steering group on search and rescue in the Arctic maritime waters shows that the facilities available to handle disasters and respond to major accidents in the area under the responsibility of the Icelandic authorities are inadequate. The steering group proposed increasing preparedness by building up infrastructure and increasing cooperation with the neighbouring states and establishing a search and rescue cluster to prioritise tasks and improve coordination. It is necessary to ensure that Iceland has adequate capabilities and preparedness for search and rescue.

It is important to fight the threat of pollution in Arctic maritime waters, such as oil leaks, toxic substances, radioactive materials and plastic waste. Oil spills in the Arctic region can remain for a long time in the environment and cause a great deal of damage to the biota since the oil breaks down very slowly; additionally, clean-up can be made difficult by pack ice, cold temperatures and bad weather conditions. The use of heavy fuel oil (HFO) in shipping in the Arctic region is a special cause for concern. Not only is it very difficult to clean up HFO in cases of accidental spills at sea, but its combustion also releases more black carbon and pollutants

into the atmosphere than other types of oil. Black carbon pollution in the atmosphere is a threat to human health and black carbon particles that settle on ice sheets also speed up the warming process by absorbing heat and speeding up melting. Iceland's Action Plan on Climate Matters provides for increased tightening of requirements for fuels used within Icelandic territorial waters to reduce the use of HFO, and a regulation to that effect entered into force at the beginning of 2020. It is important that the Arctic States unite in taking systematic action to reduce and eventually ban the burning of HFO in Arctic maritime waters, and work towards that goal within the International Maritime Organisation. An emphasis must be placed on an environmentally sound energy transition, whether at sea, on land or in the air.

Various other issues that concern environmental and transport safety in the Arctic region must also be considered. They include monitoring, the making of navigational charts, telecommunications and satellite navigation systems. Access to augmentation systems that increase the precision of positioning information, such as the European EGNOS and the US WAAS, must be ensured as widely as possible. Measures must be taken in consultation with Greenland to negotiate the enlargement of the coverage area of these augmentation systems in the North Atlantic area. There is a great deal of interest inherent in ensuring environmental and

transport safety in Arctic maritime waters and it is important to strengthen cooperation to that effect on a civil basis.

The landscape of security and defence issues in the Arctic region has changed significantly in recent years. This is both because of shifts in international relations and a result of climate change that has affected the geopolitical status of the region. The opening-up of shipping routes and possibilities for exploiting natural resources have created increased interest in the Arctic region, as well as plans for economic activities. Russia has acted prominently in that regard, as have other Arctic States. China has also become increasingly active in the region and its actions more purposeful. For example, China's 2018 Policy on the Arctic region sets out goals to realise a shipping route between China and Europe via the North Pole. Although such activities have mainly been based on commercial and scientific grounds, they can also have a security-political dimension and therefore there is reason to examine them specifically. Non-Arctic States must, in their activities in the Arctic region, respect international law and the status of the eight Arctic States and behave in a sustainable and peaceful manner.

It is the proclaimed objective of Iceland and the other Arctic States to maintain a low level of tension in the Arctic region. Despite this, the tension level in the region is rising,

with the main cause being increased Russian military developments and activities and the Western response to them. It should be kept in mind that Russia has legitimate interests in ensuring its security and defences in the Arctic region considering the changes that are taking place there. The increase in Russia's military capabilities in recent years is, however, bigger than what the situation calls for, and has a wider effect that must be looked at in a broader context. Because of these developments, Western states that are involved have increased their discussions of the Arctic region in consultation meetings on security and defence issues, in regional cooperation and within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. NATO has increased its emphasis on security and defence in the North Atlantic Ocean, inter alia by establishing a new military command centre in Norfolk, Virginia which supervises naval activities for the area. Several states have also reacted by increasing their contributions to security and defence in the North and by more pointed policy development.

The National Security Policy for Iceland stipulates that special attention shall be paid to Iceland's environmental and security interests in the Arctic in international cooperation and domestic preparedness. According to the National Security Policy, membership in NATO and the Defence Agreement with the USA are the main pillars of

the country's defences. The basic rationale for the Policy is for Iceland, as a nation with no standing military, to ensure its security and defences through active cooperation with other countries and within international organisations. Iceland must continue to work closely with the member states on the development of security matters in the Arctic region. Nordic cooperation in the field of security has been increasing in recent years. There is reason to strengthen the Nordic countries' joint analysis and policy direction for various matters that concern the Arctic region, especially concerning climate change and its effects, as recommended in Bjorn Bjarnason's recent report on Nordic external affairs and security matters that was written for the Nordic Foreign Ministers. The Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council clearly provides that the Council shall not discuss military security matters, but it may be asserted that solid and constructive cooperation in that area is likely to reduce tensions. It is all-important that the Arctic region continue to be a peaceful area, subject to robust cooperation that complies with international law and respects the sovereignty of states, thus preventing a possible escalation of disputes.

When the world turns its spotlight on the Arctic, the coverage of the region sometimes suggests that it is a vast, empty place full of ice fields populated by wild animals. There is reason to promote the fact that there are established

communities in various places around the Arctic. The total number of inhabitants in the area is around four million, of which about one-tenth are Indigenous Peoples. The inhabitants of the Arctic region have the same right as all other people in the world to enjoy human rights, welfare and opportunities to make a good living. Conditions in the communities in the Arctic region are in many ways diverse, but they do, however, face certain common challenges, which include transport and connectivity, as well as access to education, health care services and environmentally friendly energy sources. Additionally, many communities of Indigenous Peoples struggle to maintain their traditional ways of life, food security, culture and languages. In the course of its cooperation with the Arctic States, Iceland has supported the rights of Indigenous Peoples and echoed their demands to participate in important economic and political decisions.

Iceland has also supported efforts to strengthen the infrastructure of communities in the Arctic and bolster economic development and welfare. For example, Iceland has, within the Arctic Council, for many years led a project on gender equality in the Arctic region, as well as a project to find possibilities for innovation in the blue bioeconomy and to share knowledge about sustainable energy options in isolated communities. The work to strengthen societal and economic development in the Arctic region, safeguard

human rights, support equality and welfare shall continue. Public health matters are a substantial part of these efforts, including responses to various health threats, prevention efforts against alcohol and drug abuse, as well as improved mental health care services. It is also important to ensure that the communities adapt to the negative effects of climate change with sustainability as the guiding principle. The Arctic Economic Council, which is composed of representatives of the commercial sector in the Arctic States, plays an important role, including in cooperative efforts to improve digital telecommunications in the Arctic region and by introducing criteria for corporate social responsibility for companies that operate in the region.

The growing international interest in the Arctic creates various opportunities for Iceland. As a peaceful small state, situated halfway between the eastern and western Arctic States, Iceland is in a choice position to further enhance its position as a venue for discussions and conferences. Since 2013, the Arctic Circle has developed into becoming one of the main open discussion forums for issues connected to the region. Its annual assembly in the Harpa concert and conference centre in Reykjavik has generally been attended by over two thousand participants from far and wide, including officials, academics and representatives of grass-roots organisations and the commercial sector. Additionally,

the Circle has held large forums and conferences all over the world. In order to strengthen the pillars that support the Arctic Circle for the future, preparations have started for the establishment of an Arctic institute in Iceland, which would be named after Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, former president of Iceland, who was the main instigator for its establishment. Possibilities to promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the field of Arctic research and studies should also be examined, as well as sustainable innovative activities. Research is the prerequisite for being able to analyse the rapid changes that are taking place in the Arctic region and to evaluate what responses are needed. Arctic research involves many different academic disciplines which calls for active international cooperation. Access to international cooperation schemes and major competitive funds is important, but it is also necessary for the Icelandic authorities to establish and finance a special programme for Arctic research so it can be ensured that research activities are based on a comprehensive evaluation of the long-term domestic knowledge needs.

The Arctic circle passes through the island of Grimsey, a township that is the northernmost part of the municipality of Akureyri. Over the years expert knowledge and various activities in areas connected with the Arctic region, both in a local and international context, have been developed in

Akureyri, and a knowledge cluster has been created that consists of offices under the auspices of the Arctic Council, institutions and enterprises. Some examples include the Stefansson Arctic Institute which has, since 1997, worked on matters concerning the Arctic region, the office of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) and the secretariats of two of the Arctic Council's six working groups, i.e. the working group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) and the working group for the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME). The University of Akureyri is part of the University of the Arctic network (UARctic) and was one of its founders. The University has for some years offered a master's programme in polar law in cooperation with the Polar Law Institute and also hosts a guest professorship in Arctic studies that is jointly funded by the foreign ministries of Iceland and Norway and named after Fridtjof Nansen. The Icelandic Arctic Cooperation Network is a cooperative platform for institutions, commercial enterprises, civil society organisations and other stakeholders. Commercial enterprises in northern Iceland have established their own organisation, Arctic Services, which, inter alia, offers services in Greenland in the fields of industry and technology. The municipality of Akureyri has actively participated in the Northern Forum, an organisation concerned with strengthening communities in the Arctic region, and the Arctic Mayors Forum, which is a forum for

elected heads of local government in the Arctic. The China-Iceland Arctic Observatory (CIAO) at Karholl in the Thingeyjar municipality and the aurora research station operated by the Japanese National Institute of Polar Research and the University of Iceland's Science Institute at Tjornes are examples of Arctic studies programmes in northern Iceland with foreign participation. International research is also being done into the effects of climate change in the Arctic region at the Rif Field Station in Melrakkasletta, as well as monitoring of vulnerable ecosystems. The nature of Arctic issues is such that they require an interdisciplinary approach and the building of research centres where synergies can be achieved has proven successful here and elsewhere. There is a strong willingness in Akureyri to make its position as a centre for Arctic matters in Iceland even stronger, and support to that end should be given to interested parties in the area.

There are various opportunities to be found in increased trade and cooperation with Iceland's closest neighbours, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. The in-depth report of the Greenland Committee that was appointed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation, *Greenland and Iceland in the New Arctic*, was published in January 2021 and includes 99 recommendations for measures to increase the cooperation between the two countries

in various areas. As a follow-up to the report, the foreign ministers of Iceland and Greenland agreed to develop a framework agreement between the countries that will lay out goals in specified areas of cooperation. The Faroe Islands lie south of the Arctic circle but are in various contexts considered to be part of the Arctic region. The West Nordic Council is an observer organisation to both the Arctic Council and the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region.

Policy development and cooperation in the Arctic region should take into consideration the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The 17 Goals are integrated and intrinsic and create a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development, i.e. the economic, social and environmental.

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