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Protection of the environment in the Arctic region

Motion for a resolution
presented by Mr Meale and others

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only the members who have signed it

1. Co-operation in the Arctic region has made good progress in recent years. The region is very rich in natural resources (minerals, gas, oil and fish), the exploitation of which entails/will entail increased risks to the environment because of the extreme weather conditions which prevail there.
2. Furthermore, because of climate change, the Arctic region is at great risk of a warming process expected to lead to a gradual melting of the polar ice cap over this century. This will have serious consequences (virtual disappearance of summer ice, rising sea level, reduction in salinity, alteration of sea currents (including the Gulf Stream), etc) and bring a drop in temperatures in western Europe. One more favourable effect of this melting process, on the other hand, would be to make the Arctic seas accessible to cargo vessels.
3. In the far north, and particularly the Barents Sea, there are significant hydrocarbon resources currently estimated at 25% of the world's reserves. Great technological progress has enabled exploitation to begin of these deposits, which are very important for Europe's energy supplies. Action needs to be taken, however, to prevent a higher risk of pollution of such a vulnerable marine environment.
4. Where the management of natural resources and pollution are concerned, mention should also be made of the exploitation of the particularly rich mineral resources in the region, especially in Russia (coal, copper, nickel, cobalt, etc), involving highly polluting activities. The significant biological resources present (fish, marine mammals, reindeer, bears, birds, etc) could be seriously affected by pollution and climate change.
5. Some regions, such as Svalbard (Spitzbergen) (Norway) are protected. Sustainable management of resources must be developed, and the growing tourism in the region needs to be both controlled and managed in an environment-friendly way.
6. The situation is particularly serious where Russia's nuclear waste is concerned (obsolete nuclear power stations, nuclear submarines and other vessels in a dangerous state, lighthouses using nuclear batteries, nuclear waste left under water or at dangerous storage sites, and so on).
7. Only international co-operation, with very large sums of money being spent, will enable many of these problems to be solved. It should be noted that Norway and Russia have engaged in very active bilateral co-operation for many years, but this needs to be extended to the whole Arctic region in order to promote peace and stability through sustainable development.

8. Russia, which currently chairs the Arctic Council, has taken the initiative of declaring 2007/2008 International Polar Year, during which international co-operation and scientific research in the region are due to be reviewed. Other organisations are also offering to develop co-operation in the region, particularly where protection of the environment is concerned.

9. The Assembly has a duty to make a contribution to these initiatives and to put forward proposals to protect the Arctic region from uncontrolled development and non-sustainable exploitation of its resources.

*Signed*¹:

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de PUIG, Lluís Maria, Spain, SOC
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¹ SOC: Socialist Group
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EDG: European Democratic Group
UEL: Group of the Unified European Left
NR: not registered in a group