



STORTINGET

# The Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation

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## **FOREWORD**

In 2009, the Storting established an international Delegation for Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation. It comprised six members and six substitute members. The setting-up of a delegation was a natural response to increasing international interest in the Arctic and the growth of a Norwegian High North policy.

In the following article, I will examine the emergence and development of international Arctic cooperation since 1987, via the creation of the delegation in 2009, to the situation today. My emphasis is on parliamentary cooperation, which I have followed as Secretary General for the international collaboration from 2006 to 2016 and as the Storting's delegation secretary since 2009. An overall presentation of this cooperation has not previously been written. I will also review key developments within the intergovernmental work in the Arctic Council. This is important for an overall understanding of Arctic cooperation and the interplay between parliamentarians and governments. I will consider the development of Norwegian High North policy, and look at how international cooperation has influenced the evolution of our national policy.

I will finish by taking a closer look at cooperation with the European Parliament, and will consider how the Arctic Delegation has worked to protect Norwegian interests there. This part of the article is relatively extensive compared with other, possibly equally important topics. The main reason for this choice is that the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation distinguishes itself from intergovernmental cooperation in this field. The European Parliament is a full member of the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation, while the EU's diplomatic service and the European Commission have the status of ad-hoc observers in the Arctic Council. I have also described how the Arctic Delegation has worked to influence the formulation of EU Arctic policy. This final element is an example of the delegation's efforts outside the traditional meeting forums.

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Bjørn Willy Robstad

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## **SUMMARY**

The Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation began in 1993 at a time when collaboration between the east and west was flourishing after the end of the Cold War. Since the very first meeting, the Storting has been highly influential in this cooperation, and several Norwegian MPs have chaired the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region.

The members of the cooperation are Canada, Denmark (Greenland and the Faroe Islands), the European Parliament, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the USA. The region's indigenous peoples are permanent participants, and there are several observers.

The Storting's Delegation for Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation was established in 2009. It comprises six members and six substitute members. The majority of parliaments in the other member states have also set up corresponding Arctic cooperation delegations. Living conditions for those who inhabit the North have consistently been at the top of the agenda. Cooperation within education, the impact of climate change on the Arctic, and the development of vigorous and sustainable communities in the North have been other key fields for the delegation, and for Arctic parliamentary cooperation as a whole.

Intergovernmental collaboration in the Arctic Council has taken shape in parallel with the growth in the parliamentary dimension. Interaction between governments, parliamentarians and other players within Arctic cooperation has had a positive influence on international cooperation. Despite broader international tension and discord, member states have largely kept Arctic cooperation separate and have concentrated their efforts in areas where it has been possible to reach agreement.

The thematic similarities between the two polar regions have led to the Arctic Delegation becoming involved in matters that relate to the Antarctic. This was initiated in 2015-16, at a time when the Storting was dealing with the white paper on the Antarctic. The head of the Arctic Delegation represented the Storting at the inaugural Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly, which took place in London in early December 2019.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 The Storting's international delegations**

The Storting has a long tradition of taking part in international cooperation. This work takes place primarily through the international delegations, but the Storting's Presidium and the standing committees are also active participants.

The Arctic Delegation is one of the Storting's ten international delegations. Approximately two-thirds of Norwegian MPs serve on at least one of these delegations, either as a member or as a substitute. The largest of these is the delegation to the Nordic Council, which comprises 20 full members and 20 substitutes, while the smallest, such as the delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), consist of only four MPs.

Working procedures vary from delegation to delegation. The parliamentary party groups perform an important function in the Nordic Council and Council of Europe (PACE) delegations. On the other hand, they play no role in the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation, where decisions are made by consensus. One of the great benefits of international parliamentary cooperation is that MPs meet politicians from other countries, both like-minded colleagues and political opponents, get to know each other, formulate policies, and broaden their horizons. This is a common feature of all the delegations.

The majority of the delegations have a corresponding collaboration at government level. For example, the Parliamentary Assembly to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE PA) is in contact with the OSCE's intergovernmental body. This dialogue between the parliamentary side and the governmental side usually takes place in the form of recommendations from the parliamentary assembly in question to its relevant ministerial cooperation body, and through formal and informal meetings and discussions, both nationally and internationally.

The Storting's International Department employs 23 members of staff and is responsible for providing the MPs with professional guidance and administrative assistance. Most delegations may also draw on the expertise of an international secretariat, such as the Council of Europe's secretariat in Strasbourg, whose job is to support the work of the organization in question. In addition, the International Department's staff often work closely with their colleagues in other national parliaments.

### **1.2 What is the Arctic?**

There are several ways to define the Arctic. The most common of these is to say that it is a geographical area north of the Arctic Circle. (It can also be defined as an area where the average temperature in the warmest month of the year is lower than 10 degrees Celsius.) For Norway, this means that large areas of the county of Nordland, the whole of the county of Troms and Finnmark, the Svalbard archipelago, and the island of Jan Mayen are located in the region that is normally referred to as the Arctic. The other Arctic nations are Canada, Denmark (with Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Russia, Sweden and the USA. These eight nations individually and through Arctic cooperation decide on developments in the Arctic. That said, the Arctic is also strongly affected by what happens elsewhere in the world. International agreements such as the United Nations Convention on

the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Paris Agreement (the UN’s climate change agreement of 2015) have a huge impact on the Arctic.

In the dialogue and debate on developments in the north, the terms “the Arctic” and “the High North” are often used interchangeably. If we were to attempt to distinguish between the two terms, “the Arctic” is a precise, geographical concept, while “the High North” is a political and more flexible notion. In Norwegian administrative practice, a dividing line for the High North tends to be drawn between the counties of Nordland and Trøndelag.

**Figure 1. Map of the Arctic taken from the CIA World Factbook**

The map shows the extent of the Arctic based on the geographical area north of the Arctic Circle (blue line) and the areas with an average temperature below 10 degrees Celsius (red line).



**Figure 1**

## **2. THE STORTING ESTABLISHES AN ARCTIC DELEGATION**

The Storting resolved to establish a Delegation for Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation in 2009. One of the Storting's youngest delegations, it comprises six members and six substitutes. Arctic parliamentary cooperation has existed since 1993, however. From 1998 to 2009, the Storting was represented by one member and one substitute member. Between 2001 and 2009, the committee's members were Hill-Marta Solberg (Labour Party), with Ivar Kristiansen (Conservative Party) as her substitute. Solberg, in particular, was a driving force behind the founding of a separate Arctic delegation in the Storting. She had noted the burgeoning interest in Arctic questions both at home and abroad. The planting of a Russian flag on the seabed below the North Pole in August 2007 attracted great international attention. Access to natural resources, new sea routes between Europe and Asia, and the impact of climate change on the Arctic were prompting the world at large to turn its gaze to the North.

Simultaneously, Norway was investing more in its High North policy. The Stoltenberg government and its then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre, made High North policy a key issue. "Opportunities and challenges in the North", the first white paper on the High North (Report to the Storting no. 30 [2004-2005]) had been published by the Bondevik government, but it was Foreign Minister Støre who made the policy area his own, both domestically and internationally. The Stoltenberg government's first High North strategy was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006, and was followed up by "New Building Blocks in the North" on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

This growing interest in Arctic affairs prompted the Presidium to table a recommendation to the Storting on the establishment of a Delegation for Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation. The Storting's Election Committee followed this up on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2009 in Recommendation 26 S (2009-2010) by proposing that a delegation comprising six members and six substitute members should be set up. The proposal was adopted on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2009. Shortly after, the new delegation was constituted, with Morten Høglund (Progress Party) as head of delegation and Eirik Sivertsen (Labour Party) as deputy head of delegation. In setting up the delegation, the Storting wished to achieve two aims: to raise awareness and knowledge about Arctic issues in the Storting, and to contribute to the broader public debate on Arctic policy.

I will shortly go into more detail on the work of the Storting's Arctic Delegation. Firstly, however, I will describe the international backdrop that led to the start of Arctic cooperation. After that, I will take a closer look at the beginnings of Arctic parliamentary cooperation, in an attempt to place the founding of the delegation in 2009 in a wider context.



**The Storting's Arctic Delegation at the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region in Akureyri, Iceland in 2012. From left to right: Silje Bergum Kinsten (information officer), Henning Skumsvoll MP (Progress Party), Bjørn Willy Robstad (International Department), Morten Høglund MP (Progress Party, head of delegation), Eirik Sivertsen MP (Labour Party, deputy head of delegation), Ingalill Olsen MP (Labour Party), Kjell Myhre-Jensen (International Department), and Geir-Ketil Hansen MP (Socialist Left Party). Photo: Storting**

## **2.1 A new spirit of cooperation in the North**

The end of the Cold War led to a rapid growth in a range of collaboration projects between the East and West in the 1990s. The prelude to this new spirit of cooperation in the North was a speech by Mikhail Gorbachev, the then General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, in Murmansk on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1987. In what would later be called the Murmansk Initiative, Gorbachev spoke warmly of greater cooperation in the Arctic between the East and West in several sectors, including the field of environmental scientific research. The speech was followed up by the so-called Rovaniemi Process, with Finland in the driving seat. This process culminated in a meeting between the Arctic ministries of the environment in Rovaniemi in June 1991, and the founding of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). One of the most important results of the AEPS was the birth of four working groups: the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP); the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME); the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) and the Emergency Prevention Preparedness Response (EPPR). These working groups were to lay the basis for the Arctic Council in 1996, and to this day are an important part of Arctic cooperation. I will return to this later in the article.

Another consequence of the Cold War's demise was the rise in other international projects in the North. The start of Barents regional cooperation in 1993 was of particular significance to Norway, while the founding of the Council of the Baltic Sea States in 1992 and the launch of



the EU's Northern Dimension policy by Paavo Lipponen, the Finnish Prime Minister, in 1997 were also important. These projects cover different geographical and thematic areas of cooperation between countries and regions in Northern Europe.

More established organizations such as the Nordic Council were quick to lend their support to democratic development and social projects in the Baltic and Northwest Russia. There was a desire and willingness to form new ties, support the development of civil society, and tackle common challenges through collaboration, all of which had been impossible during the Cold War.

## **2.2 The start of international Arctic parliamentary cooperation**

During this time of fresh impetus and interest in East-West collaboration, the first conference on international Arctic parliamentary cooperation was held in Reykjavik in August 1993. The meeting was initiated by the Nordic Council, and was attended by parliamentarians from the five Nordic countries, Canada, Russia, the Nordic Council and the West Nordic Council. Sami politicians took part as representatives of the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic region. The meeting's closing statement clearly indicates that the environment and sustainable development were at the top of the agenda. It is worth noting that delegates also spoke in favour of defence questions being raised in a "non-Arctic cooperation forum", that an intergovernmental Arctic Council should be set up in the Arctic nations, and that collaboration should include the sustainable economic exploitation of resources in the region. Several of the conference statement's points also cover living conditions for the Indigenous population and their participation in the cooperation. These topics and guiding principles have played a central role in Arctic cooperation ever since.

Norway was well represented in 1993. The conference was chaired by Jan P. Syse (Conservative Party), who was President of the Nordic Council at the time. The Storting's Vice President, Kirsti Kolle Grøndahl (Labour Party) was chair of the drafting committee which negotiated and drew up the conference statement. Also present was Johan Jørgen Holst (Labour Party), Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs, who made a keynote speech on the recently-established Barents regional cooperation.

The Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR) was also set up at the 1993 conference. This committee has since become the operational branch of the international Arctic parliamentary cooperation. It is comprised of one to two members from each of the member states' parliaments, and meets three to four times a year. The first meeting of the SCPAR took place in Reykjavik in 1994 and was hosted by the Icelandic MP Halldór Asgrímsson. Asgrímsson was soon elected as the committee's first chair. As with the previous year's conference, delegates from the Nordic countries, Russia and Canada took part in the committee meeting. The European Parliament had been invited to attend the 1993 conference by the Nordic Council, but had needed more time to sort out who its representatives would be in the field of Arctic collaboration.

The European Parliament did join the SCPAR in 1994, however. Using the model of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), the Arctic Indigenous peoples were represented from the very outset. This meant that the only Arctic nation not yet on board was the USA, but this was rectified the following year when Senator Frank Murkowski of Alaska

was elected as the United States representative. The committee was now complete, with representatives from the eight Arctic nations and the European Parliament as its members.

For the first few years, the Nordic Council nominated three delegates to take part in the SCPAR. This practice continued until 1998, at which point the work in the committee was reorganized and each Nordic country was independently represented. The Nordic countries were organized like this for the first few years of the SCPAR for two reasons. Firstly, the Nordic Council had initiated the cooperation in the first place. Secondly, it was considered that the relatively small Nordic countries should not constitute a majority in the committee. The practice of the Nordic countries being represented by a delegation from the Nordic Council could be seen in other parliamentary forums, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) being a case in point. Today, the Storting has one permanent member in the BSPC. This was also the situation in the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation until 2009, when a delegation was formed.

One of the SCPAR's most important jobs was to draw up and pass its Rules of Procedure. This work was carried out by Clifford Lincoln, the committee's third chair (1998 to 2004), and Guy Lindström, the committee's Secretary General (1994 to 2002). The Rules of Procedure were adopted on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1999. Since then, they have been amended just once, when it was decided in 2009 that the SCPAR should have a vice chair as well as a chair. The Rules of Procedure cover committee meetings and the organization of the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region.

### **3. FROM INDIVIDUAL MPS TO DELEGATIONS**

As mentioned above, the Storting set up its own Delegation for Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation in 2009. In the period before then (1998-2009), it was represented by individual MPs. We have seen a similar pattern in the majority of other Arctic nations. Today, each of the Nordic countries has its own international delegation for Arctic parliamentary cooperation. Most of these consist of around six members, the exception being the Danish delegation, which comprises 14 members. Russia also has its own delegation, while Canada appoints two members from its Canada-Europe delegation as representatives for one term. In the USA, Senator Lisa Murkowski, who represents Alaska in Congress, has been a member of the SCPAR since 2003. From the European Parliament, the chair of the Delegation for Northern Cooperation and for Relations with Switzerland and Norway and to the EU-Iceland Joint Parliamentary Committee and the European Economic Area (EEA) Joint Parliamentary Committee takes part in the Arctic cooperation.

The fact that the majority of member states have established their own delegations has undoubtedly strengthened Arctic parliamentary cooperation. The result has been greater continuity, and more MPs gaining an insight into Arctic matters in general and the collaboration in particular. The increase in membership also makes it easier for delegations to gather broad support within their national parliaments. That said, total membership of the SCPAR has remained unchanged since 1998. Each member state's parliament still has only one representative, with the possibility of one from each chamber for bicameral parliaments. This means that the heads of delegation are those who usually participate on a regular basis, while the vast majority of delegation members do not have that option. To partly compensate

for this, delegations may meet in full when their country hosts a committee meeting, but this happens every second or third year at most.

The question of whether membership of the SCPAR should be increased has been debated. So far, those in favour have been in the minority. Those against contend that the small size of the committee has ensured that its work is flexible and relatively unbureaucratic. Moreover, at a time when parliaments are having to tighten their belts, it is hard to argue in favour of adding to delegation numbers at international meetings. On the other hand, it could be argued that an increase to two to three members from each parliament would more closely reflect the development in cooperation nationally, and ought not to diminish the efficiency of the committee. The fact that the majority of member states have formed permanent delegations also indicates that there is broad consensus on the increasing importance of Arctic cooperation. A rise in membership would provide greater opportunities to discuss national positions at the international meetings. Broader participation would also make collaboration in the SCPAR more robust and less vulnerable to absence or changes to the composition of the committee. In my view, a natural consequence of the growing interest in Arctic affairs nationally would be to increase the number of members who can participate in the SCPAR's international meetings.

Over the past two years, special moves have been made to expand US participation in the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region and to make this participation less vulnerable. The chair of the SCPAR has paid several visits to the USA to meet Congress members. Contact has been established with the chair of the Arctic Caucus in the House of Representatives, and Senator Murkowski has worked to include other senators in the committee's meetings. This work seems to be paying dividends. Five senators attended the committee meeting in Ottawa in May 2019, and when the chair of the SCPAR visited Washington DC in December 2019, he met with four senators. A greater awareness of climate change, rising sea levels and strategic interests in the Arctic appear to have prompted several Congress members to step up their involvement in the cooperation. It will now be important to make the most of the momentum gained to ensure that the US Congress is well represented in forthcoming meetings and conferences. These efforts also show the need to allow broader participation at committee meetings, as discussed above.



**Senator Lisa Murkowski, USA, and Hill-Marta Solberg MP, Norway (chair of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region), at the 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region in Fairbanks, Alaska, August 2008. Photo: Paul H. McCarthy**

#### **4. THE CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE ARCTIC REGION**

The Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region is arranged every second year. Normally, six representatives from each member parliament, representatives of the region's Indigenous peoples, and observers of Arctic cooperation are invited to attend. In addition to the nations and organizations that are observers in the Arctic Council, other regional parliamentary cooperation organizations, such as the Nordic Council and the Parliamentary Assembly to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE PA), are also invited.

The Storting will host the next Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region. Initially, it was to be held between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic entailed a change in plans, and the conference has now been postponed until the spring of 2021. The conference will be the 14<sup>th</sup> such event, with the cooperation's nine member parliaments taking it in turns to host proceedings. One of its most important features is the dialogue with the intergovernmental collaboration in the Arctic Council. As a rule, the foreign minister from the current chair of the Arctic Council takes part, though the host nation's foreign minister may also attend.

The host nation's parliament and the SCPAR work in tandem to draw up the conference agenda. The aim is to highlight the topics and questions that are of most concern in the Arctic.

It is expected that the climate will be the main item under discussion at this year's conference in Norway. Because of the huge and visible impact that climate change is having in the Arctic, there is a desire to communicate this to the delegates who will be attending the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP 26) in November 2021.

Each conference adopts a conference statement, which it sends to the member states' governments and parliaments. The statement highlights the most important matters raised at the conference, and usually tables a number of proposals on recommended action. One of the SCPAR's most important roles between these biennial conferences is to promote the thoughts and ideas that appear in the conference statement with government representatives and in other forums. Since the conference statement is intended to provide governments with input, it is essential that the conference is held before the Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council, which is also held every other year.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region was held in Inari, Finland on 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018. The main items on the agenda were climate change, economic development, and living standards for people in the Arctic.

## **5. THE ARCTIC COUNCIL – INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION**

### **5.1 The founding of the Arctic Council**

From the very start in 1993, Arctic parliamentarians worked hard to persuade governments to establish a corresponding collaboration body. However, the idea to set up an Arctic Council began to take shape in the 1980s in conjunction with the founding of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). Canada, in particular, was keen to forge closer ties between governments in the Arctic region. The Arctic Council, established by the Ottawa Declaration on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1996, based itself on the working groups and structure of the AEPS and the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation. By including the Arctic indigenous peoples in the cooperation, the Arctic Council followed the example set by the parliamentarians. Likewise, a footnote in the Ottawa Declaration stipulates that the collaboration must not extend to military matters. Once again, this is in line with the recommendations made by the parliamentarians.

One significant departure from the policy followed in the parliamentary cooperation relates to how the EU was involved in the work. Whereas the parliamentarians included the European Parliament as a member from the outset, the EU Commission was not even invited to be an observer. I will come back to the EU, and the European Parliament in particular, later in this article.

The Arctic Council also favoured independent representation from each of its members (as opposed to the parliamentary approach by which three delegates appointed by the Nordic Council represented the Nordic countries). The parliamentarians went on to emulate the Arctic Council's model by changing their arrangement to independent representation in 1998. This is by far the most common system in international cooperation.

## **5.2 A successful international collaboration**

Many researchers have referred to the Arctic cooperation as “Arctic Exceptionalism”, because the participants have succeeded in preserving the Arctic as a region characterized by peaceful and efficient international collaboration. This is at a time when international cooperation in general has run into all sorts of problems. I would like to give a brief description of how the collaboration has been organized, since I believe this may help to explain its success.

When it was formed, the Arctic Council included the AEPS’s four existing working groups and the arrangement of involving the indigenous peoples in the collaboration. This laid the foundations for the Arctic cooperation’s model. By incorporating the four working groups, the member states acquired an established culture with a scientific environmental focus. Through the years, strong and partially independent working groups have contributed to and laid the groundwork for a lot of first-rate Arctic cooperation.

Since it was founded in 1996, the work of the Arctic Council has been led by the foreign ministers and the countries’ representatives (called Senior Arctic Officials), who are usually members of the diplomatic service. The Senior Arctic Officials preside over six working groups:

- the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP)
- Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME)
- the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF)
- the Emergency Prevention Preparedness Response (EPPR)
- the Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP), and
- the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG)

The first four were part of AEPS, while the latter two are new. The working groups are headed by specialists from the member states’ ministries and directorates.

To carry out the analysis of conditions in the Arctic, the working groups include some of the most prominent scientists and experts in their field. In this respect, the partnership with the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) has been of great significance. Set up in 1990 and comprising 23 member states, the IASC is a network of researchers which has been hugely influential in attracting researchers to work on the reports produced by the Arctic Council’s working groups. In turn, these reports have laid the basis for many of the decisions made in the Arctic Council.

The arrangement practised by the AEPS and the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation of close consultation with the region’s Indigenous peoples was also followed. Today, six Arctic Indigenous peoples’ organizations have the status of permanent participants in the Arctic Council. This status ensures that the Indigenous peoples’ representatives sit at the same table as the member states’ representatives, have the same speaking rights, but do not have the right to vote. The Saami Council, one of the six organizations represented, speaks on behalf of the Sami population in Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden.

This collaboration between representatives of the authorities, the Indigenous peoples and academia has been internationally groundbreaking, and has been at the heart of many of the positive results achieved by the Arctic Council. The approach has ensured that collaboration is durable, and has enabled those involved to focus their attention on common challenges rather than the discord among members that can characterize so many other international cooperation bodies. When preparing reports, new ways of combining Indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge with Western scientific methods have been found. "Science Diplomacy" – academics from different countries working together even when political relations are strained – has also reinforced the collaboration. At long last, Indigenous peoples have been given the opportunity to influence the agenda. The result is that problems which might otherwise have gone undetected, in particular those relating to the Indigenous population's living conditions and businesses, have been detected.

### **5.3 Some of the results of Arctic cooperation**

The Arctic parliamentarians are one of several groups to have brought new initiatives and ideas about Arctic cooperation to the table. Many of the results have also had an impact on global collaboration. An important example here is 2004's Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), one of the first scientific reports to show the consequences of global warming on climate change in the Arctic. Melting ice, polar bears and changing living conditions for the indigenous peoples in the North became international symbols of the effects of climate change. The USA initiated the ACIA report when it chaired the Arctic Council from 1998-2000. Another example is the impact that studies on the extent of mercury in the Arctic had on the process that led up to the Minamata Convention on Mercury in 2013.

The Arctic Council has also been used as a platform for negotiating three legal agreements between the member states. The first of these, signed in 2011, concerns search and rescue in the Arctic; the second, signed in 2013, relates to preparedness and response to oil pollution; while the last to date, the Arctic Science Agreement, agreed in 2017, deals with scientific cooperation in the region.

It should also be noted that in 2018 the five Arctic coastal nations (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the USA), the EU, Iceland, China, Japan and Korea agreed to prevent commercial fishing in the Arctic Ocean's international waters until better scientific data is available.

A final product of the Arctic Council is the meetings between the research ministers. At these meetings, non-Arctic nations that are involved in research in the region take part alongside their Arctic colleagues. The major European players here are Germany, France and the United Kingdom. The third Arctic Science Ministerial, co-hosted by Iceland (chair of the Arctic Council) and Japan was due to take place in Japan on 21<sup>st</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020, though this has now been postponed until May 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past 25 years, we have seen the Arctic Council progress from being a predominantly environmental cooperation into a body that deals with the majority of topics that are relevant to a changing Arctic. 13 non-Arctic nations and 25 organizations have been accepted as observers. The contributions of the observers have ensured that Arctic cooperation has taken on a global perspective.

## **6. COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE ARCTIC COUNCIL AND THE ARCTIC PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION**

For the members of the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation, it has always been important to maintain a good dialogue with their government counterparts, both nationally and internationally. Parliamentarians have been strong supporters of the Arctic Council, even before its formation. Since 1996, the role of the MPs has been to take part in the political debate regarding which matters should be raised in the cooperation and which direction this cooperation should take. MPs are not bound by the same constraints as their colleagues in government. As such, they have been able to go somewhat further in the proposals they have ventured to put forward. In short, parliamentarians have continually been looking for wider and deeper Arctic cooperation, something they have achieved. Collaboration in the Arctic has increased in scope over the years so that it now encompasses the majority of fields. (Somewhat jokingly, it has been said that if you want to know what the Arctic Council is going to deal with in the time ahead, all you need to do is to read the conference statement from the most recent Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region.)

Support for the Arctic Council has been reflected in the recommendation to establish a permanent secretariat to the Council and to allocate a separate budget. Consequently, the setting up of the Arctic Council Secretariat in Tromsø in 2013, with the institutional strengthening of the cooperation that this entailed, was well received. However, a separate, sizeable budget for the Arctic Council's projects is still lacking.

Internationally, formal dialogue between the parliamentarians and government representatives takes place in the meetings of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR). Here, the Arctic Council is represented either by the current chair of the Arctic Council or a representative of the host nation. In turn, the majority of countries include their leading Arctic parliamentarian in the national delegation at the biennial Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council. This arrangement has been practised by Norway since the Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna, Sweden, in 2013. The Storting's Arctic Delegation has since been represented at every Ministerial Meeting.

The SCPAR has been granted observer status in the Arctic Council. This means that the committee's Secretary General participates in the biannual Senior Arctic Official (SAO) meetings, and that the SCPAR is invited to the meetings of the Arctic Council's different working groups. Of greatest benefit here is the opportunity for the mutual exchange of information.

## **7. IMPORTANT TOPICS WITHIN PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION**

Parliamentarians are as aware of their responsibilities as representatives of the people in international forums as they are in domestic politics. Because of this, the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation has always placed the people who live in the region at the top of their agenda.

Since the Arctic Council's initial priority was the environment, parliamentarians, in their dialogue with governments, have focussed their attention on living conditions for those who reside in the North. Alongside the Indigenous peoples' representatives, parliamentarians have been the leading advocates of the people who live in the Arctic, with the aim of creating thriving communities that are attractive to live and work in.



## **7.1 Education**

Relevant skills and educational opportunities in the North are important to all the Arctic nations. Today there are a large number of educational institutions, both large and small, in the Arctic, but relatively speaking most of these are smaller than the universities and colleges further south. Consequently, the founding of the University of the Arctic (UArctic) in 2001 received strong parliamentary support, and the Arctic parliamentarians stand as one of several proud sponsors of the university. UArctic was created to facilitate collaboration between the educational institutions in the North. It now has over 200 members. UArctic is primarily a virtual partnership with thematic networks, joint education programmes and qualifications, and exchange opportunities for students and researchers. Ever since 2001, Arctic parliamentarians have enjoyed a close dialogue with UArctic, making speeches and participating in debates at each other's events. Several MPs have played their part in increasing national funding for the university. In the Storting, Hill-Marta Solberg (Labour Party) and Ivar Kristiansen (Conservative Party) played an important supportive role at the start, and worked hard to ensure that the Norwegian financial contribution was in place.

Cross-border educational collaboration in the Arctic is vital for several reasons. It helps to ensure the provision of relevant education; it persuades young people to stay in the region; and it strengthens the cross-border ties between the people who live in the North. UArctic's policy of bottom-up collaboration, which facilitates such contact, has been a huge success.

As well as taking part in initiatives under the auspices of UArctic, the delegation has also participated in various events in Russia which have been co-hosted by Nord University and its Russian partners. The aim has been to strengthen educational ties between Norway and Russia.

## **7.2 Living conditions**

Closely connected to the initiatives to improve educational cooperation in the North are the continuous efforts to make sure that the Arctic is a positive and flourishing place to live. It is important here to note that conditions in the Arctic areas of the Nordic countries differ considerably from the northern parts of Canada, Russia and Alaska. In the Nordic region, the northern areas of the countries are naturally connected to the rest of the country, and the communities are very similar to those further south. In Canada, the USA and, to a certain extent, Russia, conditions are completely different. Small, isolated communities, separated by enormous distances, often lack such infrastructure as mains services and sewage systems. Energy is usually provided by a diesel generator.

Despite these differences, there are still some challenges within this field that are common to several of the countries. It is tempting to call this a North-South issue, with significant problems connected to depopulation, high dropout rates in education, and substance abuse. In an attempt to gain an overall impression of the situation, parliamentarians were keen to examine living conditions for people in the Arctic. Based on a model used for the UN's Human Development Report, they commissioned an Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR), which was published in 2005. This was followed up by AHDR 2 in 2015. The two reports have had a major impact, pushing living conditions to the top of the agenda not only in the SCPAR, but in the intergovernmental work of the Arctic Council as well. When talking

about the matter, Hill-Marta Solberg would say, somewhat jokingly, that we must not get to the stage where we know everything about the polar bear's living conditions, but nothing about those of the human population.

### **7.3 Economic development**

The parliamentarians have also been unremitting advocates of sustainable economic development in the region to create jobs and a prosperous society for people in the North. They have used their contact with parliamentary colleagues in non-Arctic countries to spread the important message that the Arctic is not simply a story of ice and polar bears. It is also home to vibrant communities that require the same opportunities to develop as other places in the world; the chance to make sustainable use of the resources available to them. This does not just apply to dealings with the European Parliament, which I will return to later, but to their work in other parliamentary assemblies when issues relating to the Arctic are on the agenda. The founding of the Arctic Economic Council (AEC) in 2013 was therefore warmly welcomed by Arctic parliamentarians. The AEC facilitates business-to-business activities in the North, and is involved in formulating the guidelines on how businesses can operate sustainably in the Arctic.

### **7.4 Climate change**

Global climate change will lead to the disappearance of the Arctic as we know it today. Our understanding of how global warming will affect the polar regions has improved considerably. The UN Climate Change Panel's Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate was presented on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2019. It describes the dramatic consequences of this, in the world generally, and in the polar regions in particular. According to this report, summer sea ice in the Arctic Ocean will have disappeared by the late 2030s. A new ocean will open up for parts of the year, with all the consequences this will have on animal life, human activities of different kinds, and conditions for those living along the coast. Less ice will lead to more storms, bigger waves and more coastal erosion. This in turn will force more settlements along the coast to move. Rising sea levels as a result of melting glaciers and warmer water will also have global consequences. A warmer and wetter climate will cause the permafrost to thaw, bring about more landslides, destroy existing infrastructure on land, and potentially lead to the emission of greenhouse gases that are stored in the permafrost. These developments are already having an impact on Norway. Parts of Longyearbyen have been moved because previously safe areas have experienced landslides.

Several of the Arctic Indigenous peoples' traditional industries are suffering because of the warmer climate. On Greenland, much of the hunting and trapping that was formerly done on ice is now done by boat. On the Finnmark Plateau, more trees are growing, some of which are destroying the grazing land for reindeer. More rain during winter, which later freezes, is making it increasingly difficult for reindeer to make it through the snow to the grazing areas. There are numerous examples of how climate change is affecting life in the Arctic, and how best to tackle these changes is a vital question in the Arctic cooperation. Much of the work is aimed at how we can adapt to the changes that we know are coming.

The Arctic cooperation has not yet been used as a collaborative platform to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. However, the Arctic cooperation has tackled regional emissions of black carbon and short-lived climate pollutants.



The Arctic Delegation visits reindeer farmers on the Finnmark Plateau. Photo: Storting

## 8. TRENDS IN ARCTIC COOPERATION

### 8.1 New white paper on the High North, autumn 2020

The Norwegian Government has announced that it will put forward a white paper on the High North in the autumn of 2020. Many of the other Arctic nations are also in the process of drawing up new Arctic policies in 2020. All the Nordic countries are working on strategies that are expected in the year ahead. Russia launched its new Arctic strategy in March 2020 and Canada did the same in the autumn of 2019. The content of these new reports has attracted great interest and expectation.

When Minister of Foreign Affairs Støre made what has since been called a visionary speech about the High North at the University of Tromsø in the autumn of 2005, one of his most important moves was to place the Arctic in a wider international context. Northern Norway and the High North was part of an Arctic in which Norway would take the lead in a major international joint venture. The international dimension was also an essential component of the strategies that followed and the white paper on the High North that was presented by the Stoltenberg Government in 2011.

Since then, the Arctic and Arctic cooperation has changed in many ways. Traditionally, Norwegian High North policy was conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The work on

the new white paper is still being coordinated by the Foreign Ministry, but the contribution of other ministries has grown and been given more attention and space. Nevertheless, a lasting characteristic of our High North policy has been an evident connection between foreign policy, in particular the relationship with Russia, and domestic policy; infrastructure developments, such as roads and ports, and business and industry policy. This was made particularly clear in the title of the Solberg Government's most recent Arctic Strategy, "Norway's Arctic Strategy – between geopolitics and social development" from 2017. It will therefore be interesting to see how the Government balances domestic and foreign policy in the forthcoming white paper.

A clear indication of how regional development and domestic policy have become an increasingly important aspect of High North policy is that the Granavolden platform – the current Government's political platform – includes High North policy in its chapter on local government and modernization. Economic growth, great distances and a relatively small population provide good reasons for addressing development in the northern areas of the country in particular. A period of grand thoughts about international cooperation and development in the North was followed by criticism at its lack of substance. Domestic policy measures are probably more suitable than foreign policy measures for bringing about concrete results for the people in the North. This is reflected in the setting-up of a regional High North forum in the autumn of 2016, where the Government can meet members of the Northern Norwegian county councils and the Sami Parliament to discuss development in the region.

Another factor that may have prompted this shift towards a greater emphasis on domestic issues within High North policy is the more challenging situation in world politics. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and subsequent restrictive measures have imposed limitations on Arctic cooperation. Moreover, there have been marked changes in American foreign policy since the start of 2017. The Trump administration's generally negative approach to international cooperation bodies and its views on human-induced climate change have clearly limited progress in this field.

The Solberg Government refers to the High North as Norway's most important strategic area of responsibility. The foreign policy and domestic policy dimensions here, taken both individually and as a whole, have given the High North and the Arctic a greater political significance. The consideration of the white paper on the High North in the Storting will be a good opportunity to have a thorough debate on these matters.

## **8.2 Changes in the geopolitical landscape**

Those involved in the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation have noted a growing international interest in the cooperation and the region. There are more international observers at the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, and an increasing number of countries are stepping up their presence at international Arctic conferences. Another indication of this is that several European and Asia countries have drawn up national Arctic strategies. China's strategy, produced in January 2018, has attracted particular attention. In it, China defines itself as a "near-Arctic state", and refers to the development of a new "Polar Silk Road" for shipping through the Northeast Passage. These new terms and expressions have been challenged by several of the Arctic states, most forcefully in a speech made by Mike Pompeo, the USA's Secretary of State, before the Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council in

Rovaniemi on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2019. Pompeo made it clear that there are Arctic states and non-Arctic states, but that there is no such third category, which China was trying to establish by using the expression “near-Arctic state”.

Pompeo’s speech and China’s increased interest are expressions of what many describe as a growing Great Power rivalry in the Arctic. Yet a primary objective of all the Arctic nations’ strategies is to preserve the region as one marked by stability and peaceful cooperation. Harking back to the birth of Arctic cooperation, this is often referred to as the Rovaniemi spirit. It also manifested itself in the Ilulissat Declaration of May 2008, where the five Arctic coastal nations – the USA, Canada, Norway, Russia and Denmark – committed themselves to following international law, and in particular the law of the sea, when clarifying potential disagreements in the Arctic Ocean. These same coastal states reaffirmed their commitments to the declaration at a meeting in 2016.

It is anticipated that this expressed wish to preserve the Arctic as a region of collaboration will be reasserted in the new Arctic strategies. Yet there is greater uncertainty surrounding Arctic cooperation now than there was before. The USA blocked the adoption of a ministerial declaration at the Arctic Council’s Ministerial Meeting in Rovaniemi on 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> May 2019 when delegates could not agree on how climate change in the region should be reported. In the previously-mentioned speech of 6<sup>th</sup> May, Secretary of State Pompeo said that it was no longer possible to avoid geopolitics in Arctic collaboration. The United States Department of Defense followed this up with a new Arctic strategy in June 2019, which devotes considerable attention to the strategic importance of the Arctic.

The USA’s growing interest in Arctic security policy has also resulted in the Trump administration renewing interest in Greenland. Before his planned visit to Denmark in September 2019, President Trump expressed a wish to discuss the purchase of Greenland. When Denmark’s Prime Minister, Mette Fredriksen, rejected this proposal, the President postponed his trip. The USA reopened its consulate in Greenland in June 2020 (67 years after the previous one closed), while two months previously, the USA made the decision to grant Greenland 12.1 million dollars for projects linked to industrial development and education, among others. Carla Sands, the United States Ambassador to Denmark, linked this funding to the USA’s struggle against Russia and China in the Arctic.

At the same time, it appears that Arctic cooperation under the Icelandic chair of the Arctic Council is continuing much as before. An important reason for this is that the Ministerial Meeting in Rovaniemi adopted the 2019 Senior Arctic Officials’ Report to Ministers on the work of the Arctic Council. Not only is this report a summary of the work done in the Arctic Council, but it also makes recommendations on future cooperation, especially regarding plans for the Arctic Council’s working groups for 2019-2021. Since, in practice, these working groups do much of the work between the ministerial meetings, the work there can continue largely as before.

### **8.3 A new forum for security policy?**

The Arctic parliamentarians have continued their long-standing policy of focussing on areas of mutual interest. Because of the greater emphasis on security policy in the Arctic, and the lack of a suitable arena for these discussions, they have spent some of their committee

meetings debating how this may be achieved with the least possible risk of damaging existing Arctic collaboration.

As I mentioned earlier, the Arctic Council's 1996 Ottawa Declaration explicitly excluded military security questions from the collaboration. Member states could agree to change this, but to date there has been no wish to incorporate such issues into the work of the Arctic Council. The reason for this is simple: the fear that military security questions would destroy the good collaboration that currently prevails by shifting the focus to areas where member states are known to have differing views.

There have been certain initiatives to establish a platform for security cooperation in the Arctic. Chiefs of defence, or other high-level representatives from the Arctic nations, convened in 2012 (Canada) and 2014 (Greenland) to discuss security policy in the Arctic. These meetings were discontinued after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Since then, there has been no forum to discuss military security policy in the Arctic.

All the same, the majority agree that there is the need for an arena in which security policy questions can be raised. Several think-tanks have taken the initiative to create such arenas. Among these are the Munich Security Conference and the Wilson Center in the USA.

At the meetings of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, many have argued in favour of a forum for discussing security policy in the Arctic. The SCPAR is currently looking into the possibility of convening a seminar at which researchers from the Arctic nations could present their country's view and perspective on security in the Arctic to their parliamentary counterparts. Here, once again, the somewhat freer role afforded to parliamentarians enables them to test solutions that governments must be more cautious about exploring.

#### **8.4 COVID-19 and Arctic cooperation**

The pandemic has brought a temporary stop to physical meetings. Because of this, some meetings have been conducted online, while others have been postponed or cancelled. At the time of writing (August 2020), it appears that, except for certain areas in Russia and Sweden, most of the Arctic region has escaped the worst health-related consequences of COVID-19. On the other hand, the pandemic is having a major economic impact on the region. Many Arctic industries, including tourism and fishing, are distinctly seasonal and, as such, vulnerable. When an entire season is virtually ruined, the consequences are drastic. One option would be for countries to look into closer regional cooperation, such as strengthening ties in the tourist industry in northern Finland, Norway and Sweden, in the aftermath of the crisis. That said, I find it hard to envisage circumpolar Arctic cooperation in this sector. The geographical distances are simply too great.

The pandemic has also accelerated the use of digital solutions for meetings, teaching and health checks. Nevertheless, we know that access to broadband in northern parts of Canada, for instance, is poor and expensive. When we add to the equation that the Arctic – with its vast distances, few people and, in some places, inadequate infrastructure – is actually ideally suited to digital solutions, then the case for broadening the use of technology is compelling. Arctic areas should have access to broadband that is as good as if not better than that provided

in the central areas of the same countries. Arctic parliamentarians have long been committed to this cause, and we can expect it to attract renewed interest because of the pandemic. Several of the Arctic Council's working groups have also looked into the question of communication and broadband in the region. Experience gained from the pandemic should provide a sound basis for further progress here.

## **9. THE DELEGATION'S EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES**

### **9.1 Arendal Week**

One of the main aims of the Storting's Arctic Delegation since it was formed in 2009 has been to raise public awareness, debate and knowledge about Arctic questions. Consequently, the delegation has arranged meetings and taken part in debates about the High North at every Arendal Week since 2012. As one of Norway's foremost forums for political debate, this annual event is considered suitably conducive to such a goal. Initially, the High North Center at Nord University, GRID-Arendal (an NGO) and UArctic were the main partners. Over the years, others have become involved.

The delegation has also invited international guests to Arendal Week. The chair of the SCPAR, Sara Olsvig from Denmark/Greenland, participated in 2014, while in 2017 a large delegation from Alaska took part. This included Tara Sweeney, the chair of the Arctic Economic Council, who was one of the week's keynote speakers. In 2016, the Norwegian Arctic Delegation organized an event about international Arctic cooperation, at which Samuel Heins, the US Ambassador at the time, and Tore Hattrem, a state secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, joined Eirik Sivertsen, head of the Norwegian Delegation, among the panellists.

Despite the fact that Arendal is one of Norway's most southerly towns, over the years plenty of delegates have arranged meetings on the subject of development in the North. Consequently, Eirik Sivertsen took the initiative to invite all the parties who had run events connected to the High North at the 2018 Arendal Week to a meeting in the Storting. The result was the founding of the High North Partnership, which today numbers 21 partners from business, academia and the non-profit sector, and is coordinated by the Arctic Delegation. At Arendal Week 2019, the High North Partnership organized several debates and put on numerous events relating to the High North in premises they had rented for the purpose. The head and deputy head of the delegation were on several of the panels. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant drop in the High North Partnership's activities in 2020. Arendal Week was cancelled, but since much of the planning had been done before the final decision was made, the aim was to hold some of the events as webinars.

The High North Partnership has been a successful initiative, and there are plans to continue the cooperation in 2021. What happens in the High North is a question of national importance, not just a matter for those who live in our northernmost counties. The matter belongs in national arenas like Arendal Week. The High North Partnership has raised the profile of Arctic issues and those who take part in this annual event. The meetings are more widely publicized, while the events themselves are improving as the range of perspectives grows and access to speakers from different expert backgrounds increases. As a group, our "High North friends" have given a boost to the national debate on the Arctic. An informal

evening get-together has also become a tradition. The meetings and the reception have attracted other Norwegian MPs, and have been a useful and enjoyable forum for many.



**The panellists from the Arctic debate during Arendal Week 2014. From left to right: Morten Høglund (Progress Party), state secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Eirik Sivertsen (Labour Party), head of the Arctic Delegation; Arne Smedal, businessman; Achim Steiner, executive director of the UN's Environment Programme; Sara Olsvig (Denmark/Greenland), chair of the SCPAR; and Arne O. Holm (High North Center), chair of the debate and editor of High North News. Photo: Storting**

## **9.2 Arctic conferences and forums**

On several occasions, members of the Storting's Arctic Delegation have been panellists at the largest Arctic conferences in Norway. Two in particular, Arctic Frontiers in Tromsø and High North Dialogue in Bodø, are important forums for discussing Arctic questions and the development of Norwegian and international Arctic policies. The worlds of politics, academia and business are well represented at these conferences.

## **10. THE HIGH NORTH DIALOGUE**

Another of the Arctic Delegation's initiatives has been a biannual "High North dialogue" between the delegation and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The first of these took place on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013, when Morten Høglund, head of delegation at the time, invited Minister of Foreign Affairs Espen Barth Eide to a High North dialogue in the Storting. The initiative was designed to follow up an ambition set out in the Government's 2011 white paper, "The High North – Visions and Strategies" (Report to the Storting no. 7 [2011-2012]), for more contact with MPs on developments in the North. Since then, it has become an informal biannual meeting between the Government and MPs, at which the two sides exchange information about activities and meetings, and discuss collaboration trends in the North.



Current practice is for the Arctic Delegation to invite the heads of the Storting's other international delegations and MPs with a particular interest in Arctic questions to the dialogue meetings. Several international delegations, including the Nordic Council, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, regularly deal with Arctic questions. The High North dialogue has thus proved to be a useful arena for obtaining the latest information about Norwegian priorities and views on collaboration in the North.

The High North dialogue is an example of how the Government and the Storting can meet informally to exchange information about matters of current interest. This practice also occurs in some of the Storting's other international delegations. Several other Arctic nations have similar regular but informal meetings. In the Finnish and Icelandic parliaments, for example, the government meets the Arctic Delegation before the biannual meetings between Senior Arctic Officials in the Arctic Council.

## **11. THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE EU IN ARCTIC COOPERATION**

The European Parliament is a full member of the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation. I would therefore like to take a closer look at how this has affected the relationship and cooperation between the EU and the Storting's Arctic Delegation than would normally be the case in such an article.

### **11.1 Background**

Three EU nations (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) extend geographically to the Arctic and are members of the Arctic Council. Consequently, the EU also covers Arctic areas. Because of this and because it has viewed developments in the Arctic as being significant in different ways, the EU has shown an interest in the Arctic for many years. This includes questions relating to climate and the environment, the ocean, research, military and strategic interests, and questions about resource management, resource rights and the rights of the indigenous peoples. Often, the Arctic EU nations themselves, in particular Finland, have been the driving force behind greater EU involvement in the region. At the same time, others within the EU have recognized the value of and need for such a commitment. Climate change and increasing Chinese and, not least, Russian interest in the region have prompted this. There has also been greater focus on the Arctic in the European Parliament in recent years.

Parliamentary cooperation with the European Parliament, especially through the Arctic Delegation, gives the Storting meaningful input in Arctic-related EU matters. This is particularly important when the European Parliament develops new positions on the Arctic that could affect the EU's overall policy and relations with the region. In cases where the European Parliament has been in favour of greater conservation of parts of the Arctic, it has been important for the Storting to emphasise that the Arctic is a living, populated and active region, in which sustainable business and economic growth is a central pillar.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation differs from intergovernmental cooperation in the Arctic Council. In the former, the European Parliament is a full member, whereas in the Arctic Council, the EU, through the European Commission,

is an ad hoc observer. There are several reasons why the EU has not been given permanent observer status in the Arctic Council. Initially, it centred on the conflict between the EU and Canada over the import ban on seal products, which was adopted by the EU in 2009 and which entered into force the following year (see below). Based on an EU regulation (1007/2009), the ban has since been given an “Indigenous peoples’ exemption”. After products from seals caught by Inuit or other Indigenous communities were excluded from the ban, Canada withdrew its opposition. Since then, in practice it has been Russia that has put a stop to EU observer status in the Arctic Council. This is based on disagreements that have their origins in arenas outside Arctic cooperation. Otherwise, it has been the express policy of the members of the Arctic Council to try to separate disagreement in other international arenas from Arctic collaboration, and to focus on the areas where there is agreement. Such a policy has been largely successful, and it is difficult to view the decision not to give the EU observer status as being a serious departure from this line. It should be added that for most practical purposes the EU acts as an observer in the Arctic Council, but without having the formal status.

## **11.2 The European Parliament’s participation in Arctic cooperation**

As mentioned above, the European Parliament became a member of the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation in 1994, and had in fact been invited to the first Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region the previous year. One reason for this was that the Nordic Council – the conference hosts – had developed close collaborative ties with the European Parliament. There was also a desire to promote the Arctic dimension in EU policy and to provide Arctic cooperation with a platform in Brussels. In 1993, Denmark was the EU’s sole Arctic representative. Finland and Sweden joined in 1995.

The European Parliament hosts Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation meetings and conferences in the same way as the Arctic nations. To date, the last SCPAR meeting took place in Strasbourg on 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> February 2020. Climate change and the EU’s Arctic policy were among the items on the agenda. The European Parliament hosted the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region in 2010.

The European Parliament’s representative in the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation is the head of the delegation responsible for the EEA, Switzerland, Norway and Northern cooperation (DEEA). Since the elections in 2019, the position has been held by Andres Schwab, a German in the EU’s centre-right EPP group. The manner in which the European Parliament is organized means that this is a relatively extensive remit, which in turn affects the head of delegation’s capacity to participate. In addition, interest in Arctic affairs is not necessarily the main reason for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) wishing to become members of the DEEA delegation. On the other hand, it has led to certain delegation members raising Arctic questions in EEA or bilateral contexts. Within the European Parliament, some individuals have spoken in favour of setting up a separate Arctic parliamentary delegation. There has also been a proposal to transfer responsibility for Arctic matters to the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, which has had little to do since EU sanctions were imposed after the annexation of Crimea. Some Norwegian voices have also been in favour of a separate Arctic delegation. Yet the general view is that the status quo is more favourable than a link with the EU-Russia Committee, which could risk linking Arctic questions to conflicts in other areas.

In addition to the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR) meetings, there are several other parliamentary forums with relevance to Arctic cooperation that MEPs can take part in. These are the Northern Dimension partnerships, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (which has arranged nine parliamentary conferences since 1999) and the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The Storting has hosted several conferences within these different forums, most recently the Sixth Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum in Bodø in November 2019.

The European Parliament has other cooperation forums for Arctic matters apart from the DEEA delegation. There are a number of what are called intergroups. The aim of these groups is to create arenas for the exchange of information and to further contact between MEPs and civil society. The European Parliament's Intergroup for Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development includes a subgroup for the Arctic. In 2019, Urmas Paet, an Estonian MEP, took the initiative to set up the European Parliament-Arctic Friendship Group, which he himself chairs. Neither the intergroup nor the friendship group can represent the European Parliament in official meetings. However, they can be an important lobbying network and act as a useful platform for information exchange.

For several years, the EU's European External Action Service (EEAS) has had a Brussels-based ambassador responsible for Arctic matters. The UK's Michael Mann, a former EU Ambassador to Iceland, took up this position in May 2020. The administration of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European External Action Service also has a number of other members of staff who deal with Arctic affairs. Many of these have great experience in the field. This has provided the work with important continuity, but can also make it vulnerable, since the work and to some extent the positions are closely linked to a handful of individuals.

### **11.3 Arctic resolutions and the seal issue**

Since its first resolution on the Arctic in 2008, the European Parliament has played an active role in developing the EU's Arctic policy. On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2017, the European Parliament passed a resolution on an integrated EU policy for the Arctic. Norway considered much of the content of this resolution to be positive, especially the references to international law and the wish to keep the Arctic as a low-tension area. However, other aspects attracted considerable debate in Norway. The final resolution did not go as far as the initial draft, but it argued in favour of banning oil and gas activities by calling for "a ban on oil drilling in the icy Arctic waters of the EU and the EEA."

The point of departure for the 2017 resolution was the report "An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic", which Federica Mogherini, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, had presented in April 2016. Among the points Mogherini made was that the EU hoped to play an active role and to ensure that the Arctic would continue to set an example in constructive, international cooperation. She emphasized that the Arctic was important for regional and global security. The European Parliament had also passed an Arctic resolution in 2014, based on a corresponding report in 2011. Among the issues that European parliamentarians focussed on in both of these were oil and gas activities and the international legal framework in the region.

There has often been a certain difference of opinion between the European Commission (with the EU's European External Action Service since 2010) and the European Parliament in some Arctic questions. The European Parliament has been keener than the Commission to regulate the trade in seal products more strictly. This resulted in a final regulation that imposed a total ban on such trade. Likewise, many MEPs were in favour of what could be termed a preservation policy in the resolutions on Arctic policy, including a total ban on oil and gas activities in the region.

#### **11.4 How can Norway and the Storting influence matters?**

The Storting followed the consideration of the Arctic resolution in 2017 from start to finish. Eirik Sivertsen (Labour Party), the head of the Storting's Delegation for Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation, had several meetings with key figures. Before the proposal was due to be debated in plenary session, Sivertsen sent a letter to the rapporteurs and other MEPs asking for three specific articles to be removed. The Norwegian Labour Party's membership of the European Parliament's Socialists and Democrats group allowed Sivertsen to take part in the preparatory group meeting before the vote. The issue was also discussed with MEPs in Oslo during the annual meeting between the Storting and European Parliament on 23<sup>rd</sup> February the same year. In addition, the Norwegian Mission to the EU, the North Norway European Office, and representatives of the oil and gas sector in Brussels were involved in the consideration of the issue.

Experience has shown how vital it is to have continuous and early contact in such cases. At the same time, lobbying is demanding work, and it is an advantage to establish close and coordinated contact with those who have corresponding interests. Familiarizing oneself with the viewpoints of the MEPs, among others, is important. The debate before the ban on the trade in seal products is a case in point. For many interested parties in Norway, this case was purely about resource management. Yet a number of EU countries had already imposed a national ban, and many EU politicians considered the matter to be an animal welfare issue. This diminished the impact of the Norwegian arguments.

For many in Norway, the seal issue and the resolutions in the European Parliament illustrate the need for increased knowledge about the Arctic in Brussels, not least among MEPs. At the same time, the composition of the European Parliament changes every five years. After the European elections in 2019 and Brexit in 2020, fewer than 40 per cent of today's MEPs were Members during the 2014-2019 term. This is why continuous contact with (new) MEPs is so essential. And this is where different Norwegian interests will derive mutual benefit from one another's activities. Norway's Ambassador to the EU has met with a large number of MEPs since the elections in 2019. In recent years, the North Norway European Office has organized trips to North Norway for MEPs and their advisers, the latest of which took place in February 2020.

The Storting has also initiated contact with key MEPs since the 2019 elections. The head of the Storting's Delegation for Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation had bilateral meetings with a number of MEPs in Strasbourg in conjunction with the meeting of the SCPAR in mid-February 2020. Margunn Ebbesen (Conservative Party), deputy head of the same delegation, also met several MEPs and other interested parties when she went to Brussels to take part in the opening of the European Parliament-Arctic Friendship Group on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

Contact via the established parliamentary channels is also important. This includes the EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee and the bilateral meetings between the Storting and the European Parliament.

## **12. NORDIC ARCTIC MEETINGS**

The Nordic countries make up five of the nine members of the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation. From the start, the Nordics have had a deliberate policy of not forming a bloc within the cooperation. There are good reasons for this. The Nordics are quite small compared to Canada, Russia and the USA, but have equal representation. Moreover, decisions within the Arctic cooperation are reached by consensus, and the forming of blocs could damage the willingness to compromise. It is also very much in the Nordics' interests to make the collaboration relevant and interesting for the three large countries in the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation.

Here, it should be added that the Nordic Countries by no means always share the same interests in the Arctic. The Kingdom of Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands) and Norway are two of five states that have Arctic Ocean coastlines, and along with Iceland these countries manage huge marine areas in the North. (Canada, Russia, the USA, Norway and Denmark have maritime boundaries with the Arctic Ocean. Iceland is also very much a coastal state, but it does not border the Arctic Ocean.)

Greater accessibility and human activity in the Arctic has had more impact on the coastal nations' policies than in Sweden and Finland. Finland has placed great emphasis on research, education and technology, as demonstrated during its Chairmanship of the Arctic Council from 2017 to 2019. For its part, Sweden has prioritized environmental and climate issues alongside economic development and living conditions (see the report "Sweden's strategy for the Arctic region" from 2011). All of the topics mentioned are important in Arctic cooperation, and have helped to give the collaboration necessary breadth and depth. The Swedish approach to climate and the environment, and Finland's focus on technology can form the basis of significant cross-border projects in renewable energy and other green technologies. A reluctance to form blocs should not be an obstacle to joint-Nordic initiatives in the areas of Arctic cooperation where it makes sense to work together. Between 2007 and 2013, the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council was held by Norway, Denmark and Sweden consecutively. The three Scandinavian countries decided to draw up a set of common priorities for the whole period.

Despite this underlying reluctance to form a Nordic bloc, the wish to meet the other Nordic parliamentary delegations informally has grown, especially after all the Nordics had formed their own separate Arctic delegations. The Nordic meetings have acted as a means to involve more of the delegations' members internationally. As noted earlier in this report, only one delegate from each of the Nordic parliaments normally attends SCPAR meetings.

The first Nordic meeting took place in Norway in 2016. This has been followed up by meetings in Denmark/the Faroe Islands in 2018 and Sweden in 2020. The agenda for these meetings has comprised reciprocal updates on the respective countries' Arctic policies and scientific reports on issues of common interest.

## 13. THE ANTARCTIC

During the preparation and consideration of the white paper on the Antarctic in 2015/2016, it became clear that there are thematic similarities between aspects of Arctic and Antarctic cooperation. As a result, the Arctic Delegation has become involved to some degree in Antarctic questions.

### 13.1 Background

Norway is a nation with a proud polar tradition. Expeditions to the Arctic and the Antarctic, and people like Roald Amundsen and Fridtjof Nansen helped to shape Norwegian identity in the years leading up to the dissolution of the union with Sweden in 1905. Since then, Norwegian adventurers, scientists, entrepreneurs and countless expeditions have developed this identity further. Svalbard coming under Norwegian jurisdiction, today's fishing in both polar regions, and the establishment of research stations such as Troll in the Antarctic and Ny-Ålesund on Svalbard have also been hugely significant.

Figure 2. Map of the Antarctic by the Norwegian Polar Institute

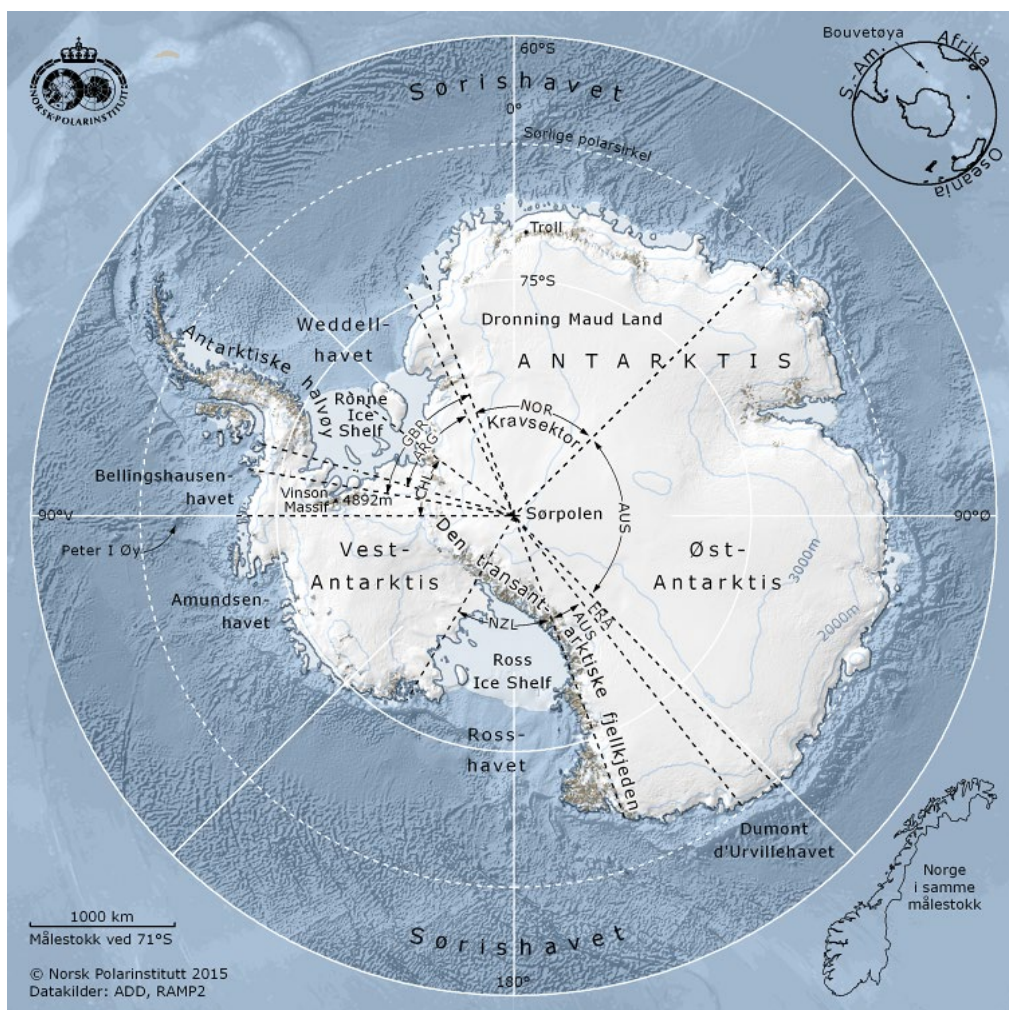


Figure 2

Norway's location and population have made it natural for us to focus most of our attention on the Arctic in recent years. 10 per cent of Norway's population lives north of the Arctic Circle and large parts of our marine areas are in the High North. In addition, the growth of international cooperation in the Arctic has brought with it optimism and attention. In the Antarctic, collaboration under the Antarctic Treaty has been going on quietly since 1959.

The biggest difference between the Antarctic and the Arctic is that while the Arctic is dominated by an ice-covered ocean (the Arctic Ocean) surrounded by five different coastal states, the Antarctic is an ice-covered continent surrounded by ocean areas. The Antarctic Treaty has, to use a fitting metaphor, put the different territorial claims in the Antarctic on ice, whereas a combination of the rights and duties of the nation states and the law of the sea have provided clear rules for sovereignty in the Arctic.

### **13.2 The white paper on the Antarctic**

Despite the fundamental differences between the Arctic and the Antarctic, the two regions have much in common. Climate change has had a major impact on both, and the consequences of melting ice can be clearly observed in the rising temperatures. Research in climate and the environment therefore has clear parallels. Both regions are a long way from almost everything else, and are themselves vast, sparsely-populated areas with little infrastructure. Yet the two polar regions are also attracting growing international attention, with a rise in tourism, and greater interest in the exploitation of resources. This brings with it problems common to both regions. Not the least of these relates to the safety of the people who travel there. Search and rescue capacity, rules for travel, and striking a balance between the exploitation of natural resources and nature conservation are topics of current interest in the Arctic and the Antarctic.

2015's white paper on the Antarctic ("Norwegian Interests and Policy in the Antarctic" – Report to the Storting no. 32 [2014-2015]), presented in Cabinet on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2015 and dealt with in the Storting on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2016, was the first such report since 1939. An update and review of policy in the field was long overdue. The white paper gives a clear indication of the growing interest other international operators are showing in the Antarctic, where China in particular has become more active.

Before the white paper was presented, the Arctic Delegation arranged a seminar called "Norway and the Antarctic" in the Storting on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015. The aim was to raise awareness in Parliament about Norway's interests in the Antarctic. The delegation took this initiative because of the thematic similarities between the Arctic and the Antarctic, and because it wanted more information about the Antarctic in advance of the white paper's publication.

During the debate on the white paper on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2016, Eirik Sivertsen (Labour Party), head of the Arctic Delegation, pointed out the two region's common features, and added: *"Through its work in the Arctic, the Storting's Arctic Delegation has amassed a wide range of contacts that will be useful in the efforts to improve awareness about the Antarctic in the Storting. The Storting's Arctic Delegation will continue to raise matters relating to the Antarctic, especially where there are thematic links and potential synergies."*

Later in the debate, Øyvind Halleraker (Conservative Party) commented on Sivertsen's speech by saying:

*“He (Sivertsen – author’s comment) raises the point of whether the Antarctic doesn’t also deserve the sort of continuous parliamentary consideration that the Arctic has received through the Arctic Council. This is an interesting question, and an initiative I believe we ought to pursue. There are undoubtedly several ways to do this, so I think we must take on the challenge.”*

### **13.3 The first Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly**

During his work in the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation, Eirik Sivertsen, head of the Storting's Arctic Delegation, has got to know the British politician James Gray. Gray has been an observer on behalf of the UK Parliament at the last two conferences of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (Finland in 2018 and Russia in 2016) and has become acquainted with both the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation as a whole and Sivertsen personally. Gray is the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions in the UK Parliament. As a result of their acquaintance, Sivertsen was invited to join a group tasked with preparing the first ever Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly. Experience from collaboration in the North was therefore important for the shaping of cooperation in the South.

The inaugural Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly took place in London on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019. 19 parliamentarians from 18 of the 54 countries invited (signatories of the Antarctic Treaty) were present at the conference. The MPs were given an introduction to the Antarctic Treaty, which had celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019, and collaboration in the Antarctic in general. The delegates adopted a conference statement which, among other things, emphasized the importance of peaceful cooperation, voiced concern over climate change and the rising global sea level, and underlined the value of scientific collaboration. The delegates agreed to hold the conference biennially, alternating between the northern and southern hemisphere. The next conference is expected to take place in New Zealand or Australia in 2021.

Sivertsen was joined at the conference by Birgit Njåstad from the Norwegian Polar Institute. Njåstad was invited to speak in her capacity as the Chair of the Committee for Environmental Protection in the Antarctic cooperation. Bjørn Willy Robstad, a senior adviser in the Storting's administration was also present.





**Delegates at the inaugural Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly in London in 2019. Photo: Peter Geraerts Photography**

## **14. CONCLUSION**

In 2018, 25 years after the first conference on Arctic parliamentary cooperation was held in Reykjavik, the Storting's Arctic Delegation decided to mark the anniversary by inviting influential members of the international cooperation to write about their experiences in the anniversary booklet "Important steps in the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation." The report was launched at the 13<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region in Inari, Finland on 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018.

The articles' authors highlighted three points in particular:

1. The Arctic cooperation is unique in an international perspective. The position of the Arctic's Indigenous peoples and the scientific reports that the Arctic nations' representatives base their political decisions on give these decisions unparalleled legitimacy.
2. The Arctic cooperation has evolved to encompass an ever growing number of topics. Because of this, the collaboration can be used to meet the numerous challenges facing the region. The desire to find good solutions to genuine problems has made Arctic cooperation flexible and dynamic.
3. The Arctic is and must continue to be a region characterized by collaboration, peace and stability.

The Arctic is still a region in which successful international cooperation holds sway. Over the years, there have been attempts in the media to portray the reality of the region in a dramatic light. We saw this after Russia planted a flag on the North Pole seabed in 2007, and after the publication of a report by the United States Geological Survey which estimated that 30% of the world's undiscovered gas and 13% of the world's undiscovered oil may be found in the Arctic. The "scramble for resources" was particularly widely reported. At the same time, however, the nations themselves have continued to work together in the Arctic Council and have indicated that they will abide by the law of the sea with regard to the division of the continental shelf in the Arctic. They have also confirmed that the majority of resources fall within previously agreed boundaries of the continental shelf.

The Storting's members in the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation have been active participants from the outset. Because of this, they have made their mark on the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region. Hill-Marta Solberg (Labour Party) chaired the SCPAR from 2004 to 2009, Morten Høglund (Progress Party) from 2011 to 2012, and Eirik Sivertsen (Labour Party) has been the chair since 2014. All three have set the agenda for international cooperation, represented the Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation in other international forums, and been important spokespersons for Norwegian views in Arctic matters. Through its international and national engagement, the Storting's Delegation for Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation has helped to direct and establish the structures of Arctic cooperation.

One of the youngest international delegations in the Storting, the Arctic Delegation has made a considerable impact, both nationally and internationally, during its first decade. By including the emerging parliamentary cooperation in the Antarctic, the delegation will also be able to draw on the experience and advantage of overlapping themes for both polar regions, as is the case at an intergovernmental level. That said, the Antarctic will remain less important to the delegation than the Arctic, not only on geographical grounds, but because there is no permanent population in Antarctica. The welfare of people is and always will be an MP's most important political driving force.



**The Storting's Arctic Delegation in Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard in 2018. From left to right: Willfred Nordlund (Centre Party), Svein Harberg (Conservative Party), Else-May Norderhus (Labour Party), Bengt Rune Strifeldt (Progress Party), Eirik Sivertsen (Labour Party, head of delegation), and Margunn Ebbesen (Conservative Party, deputy head of delegation). Photo: Storting**


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Bjørn Willy Robstad is a senior adviser in the Storting's International Department. He has been the delegation secretary of the Delegation for Arctic Parliamentary Cooperation since it was set up in 2009. He was the Secretary General of the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region between 2006 and 2016.

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