

Arctic policy needed for EU

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The EU needs a more coherent and coordinated policy for the Arctic region in order to develop new shipping lanes between Europe and Asia and ensure access to resources while protecting the environment, the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee demanded today.

"The Arctic is right on Europe's doorstep. With the United States and Russia becoming more active in the Arctic, the EU needs to develop its own strategy to open up shipping lanes and use resources in a manner acceptable to all neighbouring countries and consider the need to protect the environment", Rapporteur Michael Gahler MEP said.

Conflicts over resources amongst countries neighbouring the Arctic need to be solved in the framework of the Arctic Council, the European Parliament's foreign policy experts demanded. Existing rules such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) or the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic must be strengthened, the MEPs said. They also asked the European Commission to set up a new 'EU Arctic Information Centre' to drive forward research on this region.

In order to open up new shipping lanes, the committee demanded more research in order to establish the consequences of climate change for the use of sea lanes.

"The European Parliament has shown that it is a driving force in developing a new Arctic policy for the EU. The cross-party Euro-Arctic Forum, including representatives of the countries neighbouring the Arctic region, shows that balancing interests is necessary and possible, with the EU playing a leading role", Gahler said.