

**Speech by Diana Wallis MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament,  
at the Standing Committee of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region,  
Rovaniemi Finland 28<sup>th</sup> February 2008**

***Cross-border governance in vulnerable areas: has the EU anything to offer in the Arctic?***

Madam Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen; I am delighted to be here in Rovaniemi once again.

Rovaniemi, of course, hosted the fourth Conference of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region meeting in 2000 which I attended. It was here that the Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen was able to report on the progress of the Northern Dimension which, of course, had been a Finnish initiative during their time in the Presidency of the EU.

There is little doubt that the Northern Dimension programme has begun to fulfil its objectives, especially in its new embodiment with Russia as a full partner.

It was always important that the Northern Dimension was more than just an EU-Russia policy. That is why both the Baltic and the Arctic were seen as equal pillars with the NW Russia issue.

It seems to me that the Northern Dimension is a good example of what the EU does best, such that amongst my parliamentary colleagues everybody wants their own 'dimension' now! For so successful has it been that there are discussions now about an Eastern Dimension taking in EU relations with the Ukraine and Belarus and a Black Sea dimension incorporating existing and potential members states around that body of water.

We should not forget the Euro-Med cooperation, which already includes a complex parliamentary organisation. It is interesting that the push that for all these types of organisations has come from directly elected parliamentarians.

This current organisation of our own, the Standing Committee of Arctic Parliamentarians, has been no different in pushing messages and indeed action forward from our conferences and forums.

This parliamentary experience, and of course I would say wouldn't I, involving EU parliamentarians, has always seemed to me a good starting point for dealing with modern governance in vulnerable and sensitive areas and with vulnerable and sensitive issues.

I have not given up on the idea of a more comprehensive Arctic Charter for cross-border governance and I refer to the speech I gave to this body's seventh Conference in Kiruna two years ago. You won't want to hear a repeat of that; however I want to emphasise that the background to that speech - the potential unhindered exploitation of the region's resources - remains, indeed it could be argued that the geo-political stakes have been raised given the events of last summer. Interestingly WWF are still arguing for a stronger management framework for the Arctic in which an enhanced Arctic Council would play a key role. It is interesting and I am pleased that the Norwegian government called together legal advisers from the Arctic coastal state government to look at the issues – they apparently came to the conclusion nothing new was needed. Well, I hate to say this against my previous profession but lawyers are not naturally progressive when it comes to change - and especially not government lawyers in my experience!

It is noteworthy, that back here in 2000 not only did we hear from Prime Minister Lipponen, but we also had a very thorough and careful paper from Professor Oran Young on the

structure of Arctic cooperation. Even when I heard from Professor Young back then I thought that the EU could have something to bring to the table, in that we provided evidence of how you can work across borders in sensitive difficult areas. As I said in some ways the EU already has an interest in the Arctic: firstly through the Arctic Window of the Northern Dimension policy and secondly through the various policy areas whether it be energy security, climate change, maritime issues, or fishing, just to name a few. Yet, frustratingly, there has tended to be a lack of coordination across these various areas and a thus a failure to create a holistic Arctic or High North policy within the EU.

From an EU perspective I started the process of looking at whether the EU should set up an Arctic Unit within the Commission to manage these various cross-cutting issues which I have mentioned. It seems to me that there is a lack of coordination between the various institutions of the EU and as importantly between the various directorates of the European Commission which needs fixing.

At the very least I wanted to see some sort of Arctic Desk which would support the EU's long mooted full membership of the Arctic Council. Such support would be vital in my opinion because, although the EU has observer status at present in the incarnation of the Commission, it does not appear to be properly or actively exercised. Such detachment, we are told, comes back to resources.

In actual fact I think we have moved on from these modest objectives. I have a battle with my colleagues in the European Parliament to maintain a focus on a Northern Dimension which is more than just the Baltic strategy. I can say that on the one hand I am delighted that since the expansion of the EU to take in the new members from the Central and Eastern Europe more MEPs are taking an interest in the Northern Dimension, but on the other hand because their constituencies are very much Baltic linked, it is inevitable that the focus as I say is more on the Baltic and less on the other two pillars of the Northern Dimension.

So the time might be right for the EU to bite the bullet so to speak and take a much more proactive role in the Arctic. And here I am thinking in terms of a dedicated Arctic Policy. I believe from the other side that such a greater engagement would be welcomed.

It always seemed to me a shame that the over the years we have had a steady stream of Norwegian ministers beating a path to Brussels to present the latest version of their High North strategy. Yet, whilst being politely received, these visits and presentations have not perhaps had the impact they deserved. These have been hugely important documents but the very lack of Arctic coordination in the EU Commission has meant that there is real uncertainty as to whom this policy document should be presented. Is foreign policy? Is it environmental or energy? Or fishing? Of course it is all of these things and yet such documents, because of the nature of the EU as I have mentioned, do not fit well.

So I have wanted to see the EU put together its own Arctic policy along Norwegian lines. I would like to see the Arctic Window, increasingly sitting uneasily within the Northern Dimension stripped out and given a policy of its own. It is interesting to see after our efforts that the Communication from the Commission relating to the EU's Maritime policy published in October says: *Attention will be given to the geopolitical implications of climate change. In this context the Commission will present in 2008 a report on strategic issues relating to the Arctic Ocean.* At last!

We have also received hints and nudges and winks from the Commission's External Services Directorate that we could see a comprehensive Commission communication on Arctic policy in the coming months. In this respect I have an outstanding and marked urgent Parliamentary question to try and establish the exact timescale and nature of this. The answer to this I hope to receive in the next few days.

What I want to share with you today, despite this struggle to gain attention for the Arctic, which I believe is finally beginning to bear fruit, is my overriding feeling that I first tried to articulate with you in 2000 that the EU collectively has the advantage of certain experiences and the attachment to certain values which make it well suited to help such a vulnerable area as the Arctic deal with its issues of cross-border governance and decision-making.

I find it especially interesting since my speech in Kiruna that steps have been taken as a result of our discussions there to initiate a UN Treaty Day on those treaties having relevance in the Arctic area. Whilst I think this is a hugely important initiative we should not forget that international law in general is not receiving the support and acknowledgment that our forebears, who created such systems, might have hoped for. International law in the traditional sense after the Iraq War looks sadly in a very tattered state. Whilst on the positive side the EU as a set of international institutions perhaps at its best represents the high point of what novel and modern international law can achieve by a pooling of sovereignty and decision-making.

In terms of creating any novel inter-governmental structure and restating the importance of respect for international law and treaties nobody could be more appropriate than the EU. It exists on the basis only of the choice of its Member States in creating an international legal framework. The EU is basically a legal creation and is the example par excellence of international law functioning and being respected in an age in which it otherwise appears to be in some disrepair. This for me is an important signal or symbol. And symbols can sometimes be of crucial value.

Add to this EU's actual daily experience of cross border work; the EU is fundamentally about breaking down barriers in order to recognise the economic potential of all areas and regions. Recognising now that it is especially important that we do not create new frontiers that are barriers with our new or indeed old neighbours; particularly in the north.

The relevance of the EU to the north, in the current context, becomes even more persuasive when one looks the leadership role the EU has played and continues to exert globally in respect, not only of the debate on climate change, but also action in terms of practical legislation across one of the world's largest and most developed markets. It should make more of the experience and that of its own Arctic nations in this context.

Again management and care of the oceans goes far beyond national frontiers and is already the stuff of many international treaties but the EU is trying to push the debate, and again more importantly action, even further amongst its own Member States. It has proved rightly impossible to create a new maritime strategy without having regard to Arctic issues. The discussion over the new Maritime Strategy well illustrates the way in which the EU's systems of cross border governance and legislation have to perform the delicate balance of interfacing with existing international agreements whilst at the same time creating a regime amongst the member states that goes further and deeper and thus may well by example help push or guide the international debate.

Security of energy supply along with climate change are the dual issues that will dominate the debate in the coming years. The member states are now developing a more coherent energy policy of which the Arctic resources and impacts should form a key part. It is ridiculous to have this debate without an Arctic dimension.

It is quite clear in relation to many of these issues that various countries still continue to have bilateral negotiations and agreements and certainly, for example, within the EU this continued bilateral method of working creates tensions. Here one could cite the proposed Nordstream gas pipeline across the Baltic. It is particularly important where there are all sorts of

sensitivities both political and environmental, that countries should try and work in a transparent and multilateral cooperation. The EU provides this potential framework and increasingly from its own internal and external experiences can help provide a template for a more modern and flexible form of cross border governance which most importantly has the advantage of the deep involvement of directly elected parliamentarians and representatives.

Finally, the Arctic is now generally acknowledged to be the epicentre of global climate change. This centre point is not merely at the EU's backdoor; indeed arguably if you take into account our three Arctic member states, it is already well over the threshold. What I would like to see is all the family members, both near and extended, sitting down together at the kitchen table!

The Arctic Council has historically provided this forum but we need to develop this into more modern, flexible and innovative ways. In this respect the EU has a narrative which it should not be shy about telling and I hope others would be equally willing to listen about that experience of cross-border issues.

Ends.