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Finland's Arctic Foreign and Security Policy

Policy document,
Minister for Foreign Affairs,
November 2025

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Abstract

Finland's objective is a stable and secure Arctic governed by the principles of international law and sustainable development. Indigenous peoples and the region's population play a key role in building the future of the Arctic.

Intensified great power competition, Europe's changing security landscape and accelerating climate change are strongly reflected in the Arctic. This changing context means Finland needs to clarify the objectives and means of its Arctic foreign and security policy.

The Arctic's stability and security are built on multilateral cooperation. The other Nordic countries, Canada and the United States are Finland's close allies and partners in both NATO and the Arctic Council. Finland contributes to strengthening NATO's deterrence and defense in the Arctic region. For stability and sustainable development in the Arctic, the European Union is of key importance.

Finland possesses significant Arctic and cold-climate expertise, which we share with our partners to help build a sustainable future for the Arctic.

This policy document complements Finland's Strategy for Arctic Policy (2021) and the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy (2024).

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FOREWORD

The Arctic has emerged at the centre of international politics as one of the arenas of great power competition. Its critical natural resources and new sea routes attract interest. As a result, an increasing number of states seek to strengthen their presence in the Arctic.

Finland's long-standing objective is a peaceful Arctic region that is governed in good cooperation by the eight Arctic States, based on international law and with respect for indigenous peoples.

In the new international competitive environment, we must respond to growing economic and military tensions. We can no longer assume that the Arctic holds a special status, untouched by international security policy tensions.

This is why we have drawn up this policy document, which complements Finland's Strategy for Arctic Policy (2021) and the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy (2024) in terms of Arctic foreign and security policy.

The race to the Arctic is introducing new players to the region, along with new kinds of challenges. At the same time, it creates new opportunities for Finland, whose expertise and engagement in Arctic matters is long established. We now aim to take on an even more prominent role, all the while recognising the significant responsibility that comes with being one of the eight Arctic States.

Finland has much to contribute to both Arctic security and making sustainable use of the economic potential of the Arctic. Our expertise in cold conditions and Arctic matters is world-leading. As a member of the European Union, NATO and the Arctic Council, we can influence the direction and actions that these organisations are taking.

Our partners can trust that Finland will promote the stability and peaceful development of the Arctic on the basis of international law, now and in the future. We cooperate closely with our allies and all other states that share the same objectives as we.

Elina Valtonen
Minister for Foreign Affairs

1 Introduction: New strategic landscape calls for renewed engagement

The intensified great power competition, the deterioration of European security following Russia's war of aggression and the effects of climate change are strongly reflected in the Arctic. The rivalry between great powers has increased the economic and military significance of the Arctic, introducing a military dimension into Arctic discourse alongside the concept of comprehensive security. At the same time, the accession of Finland and Sweden to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has strengthened security in Northern Europe. The Arctic region is an inseparable component of Euro-Atlantic security.

As one of the eight Arctic States, Finland plays a central role in shaping Arctic foreign and security policy. The growing international interest in the region entails both responsibilities and opportunities for Finland.

In this context, Finland must demonstrate particular vigilance and engagement when it comes to foreign and security policy, both nationally and in close cooperation with our allies and partners. Arctic foreign and security policy must take into account the effects of climate change, evolving sea routes and demand for the region's natural resources – particularly hydrocarbons and minerals. Attention must be paid to the needs of indigenous peoples and other local populations and to economic interests that the changing conditions have brought about.

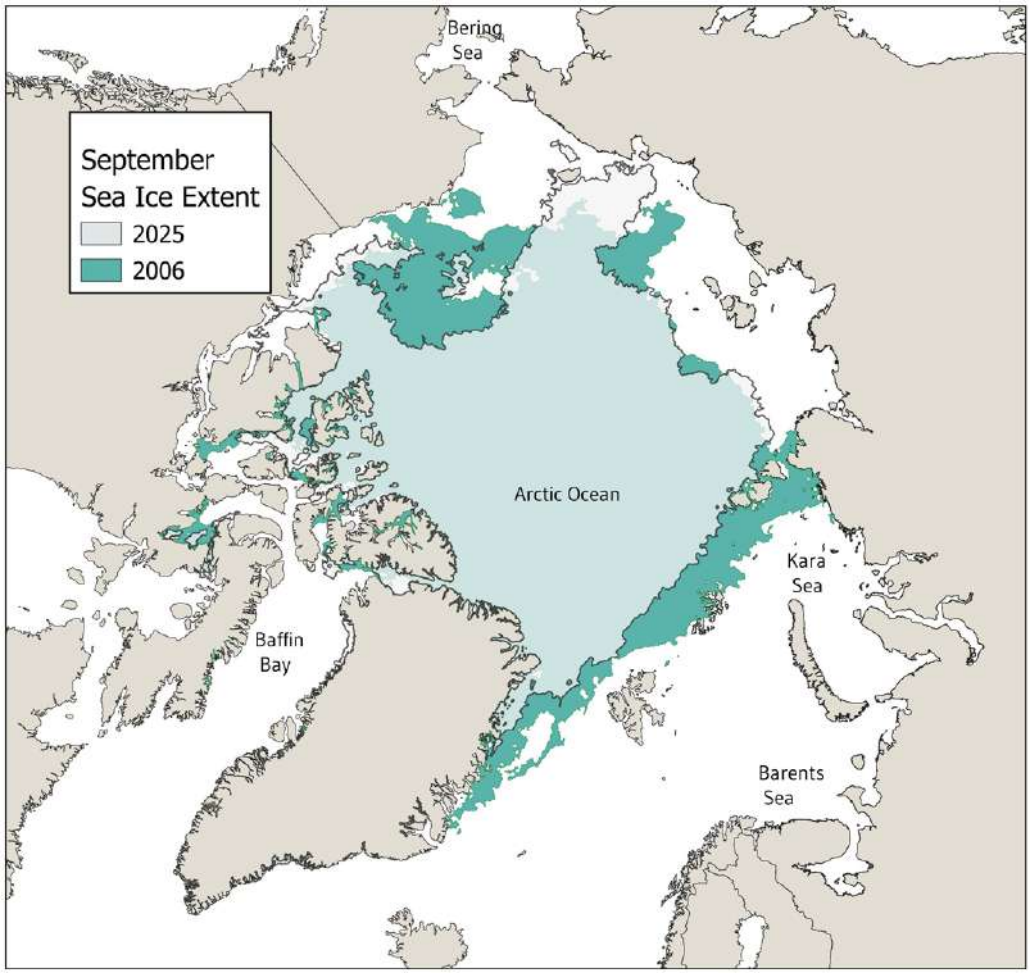
This new strategic setting calls for a clearer articulation of Finland's objectives and instruments in Arctic foreign and security policy. This policy document contributes to that effort. It complements Finland's Strategy for Arctic Policy, published in June 2021, and the Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy, adopted in June 2024, with regard to Arctic foreign and security policy.

Finland's Strategy for Arctic Policy defines the entire country as Arctic. Its priorities include climate change mitigation and adaptation, the promotion of people's wellbeing and the rights of the Sámi as an indigenous people, Arctic expertise, trade and cutting-edge research as well as infrastructure and logistics.

2 Current situation: Challenges, opportunities and stakeholders

While climate change is altering living conditions across the globe, its effects and risks are particularly pronounced in the Arctic. The decline of sea ice and other rapidly changing conditions are, on the one hand, opening new routes for shipping and trade, while on the other hand, fluctuating weather patterns and changing ice conditions are making navigation increasingly difficult.

Picture Sea ice extent in September 2006 and 2025.



Source: Arctic Centre

Phenomena associated with climate change are intensifying international competition over Arctic natural resources and sea routes, simultaneously increasing environmental and military risks.

For a long time, military security was absent from the Arctic debate in the post-Cold War era. However, tensions began to surface in the past decade as global warming opened new shipping routes and led to the discovery of new oil and gas reserves and mineral deposits, sparking the interest of China and the United States. Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 further escalated tensions in the Arctic region.

The race to the Arctic is generating demand for Finnish expertise. Finland possesses considerable technological expertise and industrial capacity, and we understand the conditions in the Arctic and know how to operate there. The Arctic environment presents exceptional challenges for human activity, underscoring the value of experience and specialised knowledge.

Finnish expertise serves both peacetime needs and crisis preparedness. Our cold-climate expertise gives us a competitive advantage, particularly in the maritime industry, but also across other sectors of design and production.

2.1 Russia's war of aggression and global competition

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the erosion of European security and the accelerating strategic competition have stimulated discourse on Arctic security and defence.

There has been a surge of military activity and confrontational behaviour in the Arctic, removing the grounds from what has long been called the Arctic exceptionalism. Although the risk of direct conflict remains low, the 2024 Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy notes that the changes in the security environment in Northern Europe are also reflected in a rising potential for conflict in the Arctic.

Russia continues to assert its role as an Arctic power and has long built up its military presence in the region to safeguard its geopolitical and economic interests. Controlling the Northern Sea Route is central to Russia's security thinking and has driven the expansion of its military infrastructure. The Northern Fleet remains a key strategic asset for Russia.

China's interest in the Arctic has grown. It aims to become a polar power by the end of this decade and is working towards an independent capability to operate in polar conditions. China seeks to secure access to Arctic sea routes and thereby strengthen its presence in the region.

The Arctic represents a long-term strategic interest for China. While its primary focus is on the region's economic potential, the security policy dimension is also gaining ground in China's Arctic thinking. China has expressed its intention of becoming more active in the governance of the Arctic region.

China's efforts to expand its presence are evident in its increased focus on research and development. The Arctic offers opportunities to exploit new sea routes to meet China's growing demand for energy and raw materials. The Northeast Passage is China's 'Polar Silk Road' and forms part of its Belt and Road Initiative. China's economy is heavily dependent on exports and shipping routes.

The Russian Far East serves as China's gateway to the Arctic. China relies on Russia to strengthen its foothold in the region. Deepening cooperation between the two countries is raising tensions in the Arctic and has implications for security in Finland.

Picture Icebreaker Polaris assists a cargo ship near the port of Oulu.



Source: Finland Image Bank

2.2 Finland's allies and partners

The **Nordic countries** are Finland's most important allies also in Arctic cooperation. For decades, the Nordics have worked closely together within the framework of Nordic agreements and institutional structures. Cooperation in areas such as security of supply, search and rescue services and environmental issues forms part of comprehensive security.

The development of northern road and rail connections from Northern Finland through Sweden to Norway is vital from both economic and security policy perspectives. The Nordic Council of Ministers strives to promote Arctic cooperation and sustainable development.

Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO has enabled the Nordic countries to significantly deepen their defence cooperation, free from political constraints.

Nordic interagency cooperation and the preparedness of individuals and households are particularly important in the sparsely populated North Calotte. Cross-border coordination among authorities improves access to public services.

The **United States** is increasingly viewing the Arctic through the lens of global competition, shaped by the 'America First' policy. It prioritises national security, economic cooperation, energy and critical minerals, and focus has shifted away from climate change mitigation and sustainable development. US statements concerning Greenland have raised questions. The United States is keeping a sharp eye on Russia and China.

The United States is expected to increase its presence in the Arctic in the coming years. This includes space infrastructure (satellites, ground stations) and, in particular, missile defence systems.

The United States is co-developing icebreakers with Finland and continues to build capabilities with Canada and Finland through the trilateral Icebreaker Collaboration Effort (ICE Pact). Through its Arctic waterways policy, the United States is reinforcing its position in Arctic waters.

Canada has become more active in the Arctic in recent years, including on security matters, and seeks to deepen cooperation with the Nordic countries. It has announced significant investments in the security and infrastructure of its northern territories. It is important for Finland to deepen cooperation with Canada in transatlantic security and in developing NATO's northern capabilities.

Interest in the Arctic is also growing in the Pacific. Among Finland's partners, **Australia**, **New Zealand** and **Japan**, in particular, have expressed a desire to increase polar cooperation.

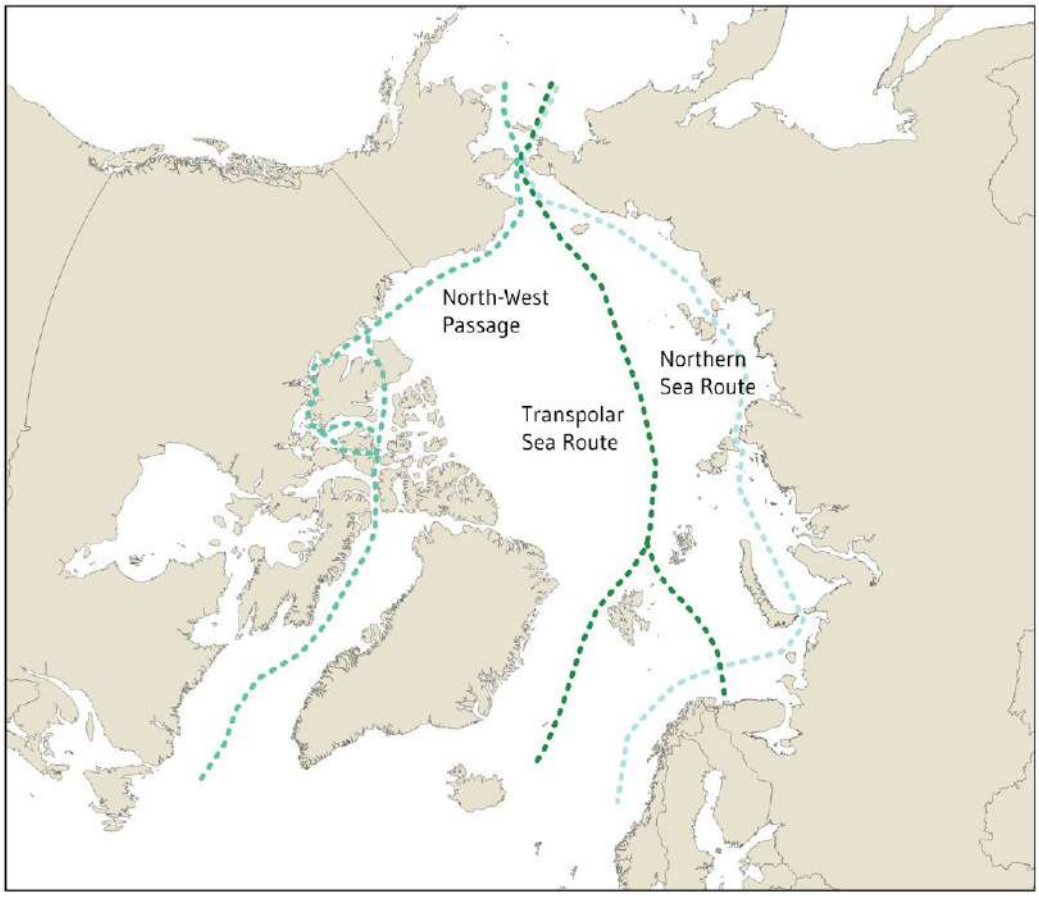
NATO plays a central role in promoting transatlantic security. The accession of Finland and Sweden to the Alliance has strengthened the security and defence in Northern Europe, reshaping the strategic landscape of the High North.

All Arctic States, with the exception of Russia, are now members of NATO where this group is commonly referred to as the Arctic Allies (A7). Since Finland and Sweden joined NATO, the Alliance has assumed a more prominent role as a guarantor and provider of stability in Northern Europe.

The Baltic Sea region and the Arctic are closely intertwined in terms of security. The Baltic Sea is now almost entirely surrounded by NATO Allies. NATO has increased its focus on the Arctic, and NATO members are stepping up their military exercises in Northern Europe and the Arctic Ocean. The establishment of NATO's Forward Land Forces (FLF) in Northern Finland will enhance the Alliance's deterrence and defence in the North and across the wider Arctic region.

The concept of the High North is mentioned in NATO's Strategic Concept in the section addressing the threat posed by Russia. Sea routes in the North Atlantic are of critical importance to Europe's defence. The GIUK gap, the sea area between Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom, is gaining strategic relevance for the security and resilience of Europe and the Euro-Atlantic area. The Alliance no longer views the Arctic primarily as a sea domain – with Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO, the land and air domains have become significantly more prominent in NATO's approach to the Arctic.

Picture Arctic sea routes.



Source: Arctic Centre

The **Arctic Council** has no mandate in security policy matters, yet the geopolitical situation strongly affects its activities. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 altered the nature of cooperation within the Council. Russia remains a member, but no political level meetings or meetings of Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) are held among all the Arctic States. Expert and research cooperation continues within working groups, particularly in areas related to environmental issues, sustainable development in the Arctic and emergency preparedness and response.

The Arctic Council is the only and most important framework for intergovernmental cooperation for all Arctic States. The Saami Council together with five other indigenous peoples' organisations have been granted Permanent Participant status in the Arctic Council, taking part in the decision-making at all levels. This makes the Council internationally unique.

Safeguarding the Arctic Council's activities has helped prevent scenarios where cooperation structures established by non-Arctic stakeholders could undermine the status of the Arctic States.

The number of Arctic Council Observers from outside the Arctic region illustrates the level of interest in Arctic cooperation. Many countries have applied or consider applying for observer status. The European Union is a de facto observer. Constructive cooperation with observers is essential to the work and continuity of the Arctic Council.

The **European Union** (EU) is a stakeholder in the Arctic through its programmes, legislative powers and three of its Member States, Finland, Denmark and Sweden. The Arctic provides the EU with knowledge, resources and energy that are vital to achieving the EU's climate targets. Pressure on Arctic natural resources, such as critical minerals, is increasing. The EU's actions play a significant role in reducing environmental problems and in mitigating environmental impacts. The European External Action Service has a Special Envoy for Arctic matters, and the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) is responsible for Arctic matters in the European Commission.

Finland has long worked to strengthen the EU's Arctic policy. This policy has been refined through four joint communications of the European Commission and the European External Action Service; the first was published in 2008 and the most recent in 2021. These joint communications have emphasised the importance of sustaining the Arctic as a region of peaceful cooperation, of slowing the pace of climate change and of supporting sustainable development in the region.

The EU's engagement in the Arctic varies by policy area and is linked to the European Arctic. However, cross-border impacts of climate change, the green transition and initiatives such as Horizon Europe are expanding the EU's role. In July 2025, the Commission announced the launch of a review of its Arctic policy.

Security policy has become more visible in the North Calotte and Finnish Lapland following Finland's accession to NATO. Respect for indigenous peoples' territories, livelihoods and sacred sites in all policies is consistent with Finland's human rights policy. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) sets out the principles by which states negotiate and cooperate with indigenous communities. The Finnish Act on the Sámi Parliament incorporates the concept of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), which is a core element of indigenous rights.

The Sámi are the only indigenous people within the EU. The representative body of the Sámi in Finland, the Sámi Parliament, has expressed its desire to be more actively involved in shaping Finland's EU policy. The rights of indigenous peoples are a priority in Finland's international human rights policy.

3 Objectives

Finland's objective is a peaceful and stable Arctic region, where activities are based on constructive cooperation and international law, safeguarding the rights and living conditions of the region's population. As in other areas of its foreign and security policy, Finland is prepared for rising tensions and interstate disputes and works to prevent them.

Expectations are placed on Finland's Arctic role, engagement and expertise, and meeting these expectations aligns with Finland's national interests. Interaction between the Arctic region and countries operating in the Arctic must be based on constructive cooperation and international law also in the future. It must safeguard the rights and wellbeing of the region's population, promote environmental protection and ensure that natural resources are used sustainably.

While great power rivalry in the Arctic raises tensions and may threaten sustainable development, growing investment in the region also presents economic opportunities for Finland.

Finland seeks to ensure that Arctic cooperation becomes a higher priority within the European Union. In line with Finland's Strategy for Arctic Policy, our aim is a coherent EU Arctic policy that is sufficiently resourced. Finland's goal is to maintain its leadership role as an Arctic Member State of the EU.

NATO's strategic posture has evolved following the accession of Finland and Sweden. Now all Arctic States except Russia are members of the Alliance. The membership of Finland and Sweden has forged stronger links between the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic.

The United States and Russia are Arctic States, whereas China – despite its growing interest – is not. Finland considers that Arctic cooperation should continue within the framework of the Arctic Council. In terms of Arctic foreign and security policy, the most relevant reference group for Finland remains the Arctic Seven (A7), comprising the seven Arctic Allies, i.e. the Nordic countries, Canada and the United States. The Nordic countries continue to be Finland's closest partners.

Security in Northern Europe is a comprehensive system in which developments in the Baltic Sea region, Finland's Arctic neighbourhood and the North Atlantic are closely interconnected. In an unpredictable international environment, Finland aims to act in a way that prevents problems elsewhere from spilling over into the Arctic or escalating there.

A strong national defence capability as part of NATO's deterrence and defence is the foundation for security in Finland. It is essential for Finland that NATO has sufficient capabilities to operate in the Arctic region.

Finland possesses considerable technological expertise and industrial capacity. We understand the cold conditions in the Arctic and know how to operate there. Finnish expertise serves both peacetime needs and crisis preparedness. This specialised expertise gives us a competitive advantage, particularly in the maritime industry, but also across other sectors of design and production. The High North is also important for space technology and satellites.

The ICE Pact, enhancing Allies' icebreaking capacity, is a priority for Finland. This cooperation between Finland, Canada and the United States will strengthen the ability to design, build and maintain icebreakers and to improve Arctic capabilities among Allies. Bilateral cooperation complements these efforts. Finland and the United States signed a memorandum of understanding on icebreaker cooperation in the autumn of 2025. Finland works closely with Sweden and other Nordic countries on icebreaking matters.

Interest in exploiting the Arctic seabed and constructing undersea infrastructure is growing. For Finland, it is essential that all activities comply with international law and take environmental considerations into account. Preventive protection of the marine environment and critical maritime infrastructure is of key importance.

Alongside economic considerations, it is equally important to promote sustainable development and the clean energy transition, facilitate scientific cooperation, safeguard the wellbeing of Arctic populations and keep the Arctic region stable, inhabited and vibrant.

International cooperation is also needed to prepare for exceptional situations caused by natural conditions and human activity. Greater access to the Arctic increases the risk of accidents and environmental hazards. Finland's expertise in the Arctic region and cold climate conditions, as well as our technological knowledge and environmental awareness will become increasingly important in the years ahead.

4 Measures

1. Finland promotes Arctic stability and security in cooperation with its allies and partners, emphasising the importance of respecting international law.

Stability and security in the Arctic region enhance security in Finland. Compliance with international law forms the foundation for cooperation and is a prerequisite for security. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea govern the rights and obligations of states regarding the use of the seas, their natural resources and the protection of the marine environment. It is considered to provide the legal framework for all maritime activities. With the accession of Finland and Sweden, NATO plays a strong role in ensuring stability in Northern Europe, covering both the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic region. Finland is a security provider within the Alliance. Ensuring security and safeguarding the continuity of the Arctic Council are not mutually exclusive.

2. Finland promotes the leadership role of the Arctic Allies (A7), i.e. the Nordic countries, Canada and the United States, in Arctic security and actively contributes to High North matters within NATO.

Finland promotes enhanced situational awareness and approach to High North matters among the Arctic Allies and more broadly within the Alliance. NATO uses the term 'High North' to refer to the European Arctic. Finland works to mainstream Arctic considerations in NATO's activities and enhance other Allies' understanding of Arctic matters.

Close cooperation and dialogue among Arctic Allies strengthen unity, promote shared interests and generate common situational awareness of security issues in the Arctic. It is also beneficial to discuss Arctic security with non-Arctic states that participate in northern security cooperation as allies.

The United States is a key ally and strategic partner for Finland. The United States' commitment to sustainable Arctic cooperation and security is important for Finland, including in terms of the governance of the region. Finland will engage with the United States on Arctic security matters both bilaterally and multilaterally through NATO and A7 cooperation.

3. Finland actively influences in the direction and content of the EU's Arctic policy.

The EU is important for Finland in terms of Arctic stability, security and sustainable development. Finland will actively contribute to the review and updating of the EU's Arctic policy. Finland participates in formulating the EU's Arctic policy and Arctic programmes in areas such as comprehensive security, research, environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation and countering hybrid threats.

4. Finland promotes the role of the Arctic Council as the primary intergovernmental forum for Arctic matters and as an institution advancing rules-based governance in the region.

The Arctic Council is the only intergovernmental cooperation structure where all Arctic States are involved. It is essential for Finland that questions concerning the future of the Arctic are discussed within the framework of the Arctic Council, among the Arctic States and indigenous peoples' organisations. Establishing parallel permanent forums for Arctic matters would endanger the Arctic States' ownership over the region.

Finland's objective is to preserve the Arctic Council's relevance and its primacy in decision-making affecting governance and sustainable development in the region. Finland participates in the Council's work through jointly agreed formats and coordinates its positions in close cooperation with the other Nordic countries as well as Canada and the United States. Finland works to find solutions that ensure the Council's status and operational capacity.

The Arctic Council's working groups and expert groups strengthen multilateralism in a context where political and diplomatic cooperation is limited. Finland encourages the Council's working groups and affiliated structures to continue cooperation on comprehensive security, environmental security, climate and nature protection, research and crisis preparedness, in accordance with agreed procedures. This work also strives to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and other Arctic populations as well as the natural environment.

5. Finland strengthens national cooperation and coordination on Arctic security.

Arctic cooperation spans several branches of government. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs strengthens cooperation on Arctic security with key national stakeholders to maintain and improve shared situational awareness. Finland develops the leadership of Arctic policy within the Ministry. It coordinates and reinforces the implementation of the Arctic foreign and security policy agenda as part of its broader foreign and security policy.

6. Finland strengthens cooperation to counter hybrid threats.

Finland seeks to identify and analyse hybrid activities in the Arctic region and to contribute to countering them as part of NATO and the EU. Damage to undersea infrastructure, the spread of disinformation via social media and attempts to acquire land near critical sites are phenomena also observed in the Arctic.

7. Finland applies its Arctic expertise and perspectives consistently and broadly.

Arctic expertise is a national strength that enhances Finland's appeal in the eyes of allies and partners. It is important to develop and apply this expertise multilaterally, within both the EU and NATO, as well as in bilateral contexts. This includes research cooperation, technological solutions and operational capabilities in Arctic conditions.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs guides Team Finland's foreign functions more robustly towards the commercial promotion of Finland's Arctic expertise and the attracting of investment. This includes marketing cold climate expertise in industry and other business sectors, building partnerships and fostering research and industrial cooperation.

8. Finland continues to advance icebreaker collaboration.

Through the trilateral ICE Pact with Canada and the United States, Finland can concretely apply its Arctic expertise for both commercial and defence purposes. This will also strengthen the icebreaking capacity of the entire Alliance and its ability to operate in the Arctic region. Finland reinforces the ICE Pact nationally through the cooperation between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and other partners with the aim of commercially leveraging Finnish technological and industrial know-how with Allies and supporting stable development in the Arctic.

Finland further deepens cooperation with Canada, the United States and other partners. Finland utilises fully the opportunities provided by the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the United States. The MoU enables close and long-term cooperation in maritime industry.



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