The Arctic: Sweden's strategy for the region

Parallel to the priorities of the Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, the Swedish government has also adopted a national strategy for the Arctic region. A summary of the strategy follows. A full English translation of the strategy will be published by the end of May, under the heading "Download" in the right hand column.

The purpose of the Government's Strategy for the Arctic Region is to present Sweden's relationship with the Arctic, together with the current priorities and future outlook for Sweden's Arctic policy, proceeding from an international perspective. The strategy begins with a summary, followed by an introduction to Sweden as an Arctic country. It then goes on to specify how, and through which international cooperation bodies and bilateral channels, the Government should seek to achieve its objectives for the Arctic. Finally, it discusses the top priorities in the strategy's three thematic areas: climate and the environment, economic development, and the human dimension. This is the first strategy the Government of Sweden has adopted on the Arctic as a whole, and should be seen as a starting point for further development of cooperation in the region.

The Arctic region is in a process of far-reaching change. Climate change is creating new challenges, but also opportunities, on which Sweden must take a position and exert an influence. New conditions are emerging for shipping, hunting, fishing, trade and energy extraction, and alongside this new needs are arising for an efficient infrastructure. New types of cross-border flows will develop. This will lead state and commercial actors to increase their presence, which will result in new relationships. Moreover, deeper Nordic and European cooperation means that Sweden is increasingly affected by other countries' policies and priorities in the Arctic. It is in Sweden's interest that new emerging activities are governed by common and robust regulatory frameworks and above all that they focus on environmental sustainability.

Sweden will work to ensure that the Arctic remains a region where security policy tensions are low. In bilateral and multilateral contexts, Sweden should emphasise the importance of an approach based on a broad concept of security, and that the use of civil instruments is preferable to military means. The role of the Arctic Council as the central multilateral forum for Arctic issues should be strengthened. The Council should be more active in developing common policies and practical projects for the benefit of the region. Sweden will actively contribute to the ongoing development of an EU policy on Arctic issues. Advantage must be taken of cooperation and synergies between the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Arctic Council, as well as with the various EU cooperation programmes and the means at their disposal. In the Nordic Council of Ministers, Sweden will work to give projects with an Arctic orientation increased focus. Activities and cooperation in the Arctic must be conducted in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other relevant international agreements.

Sweden wants to promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development throughout the Arctic region. Sweden will work for substantially reduced global emissions of greenhouse gases and short-lived climate forcers. In cooperation with other Arctic countries, Sweden will contribute to data and proposals for action to
strengthen the long-term capacity of Arctic communities and environments and their adaptation to a changed climate. This will increase resilience to climate change and create conditions for long-term sustainable development in the region. Emissions of persistent bioaccumulative organic pollutants need to be reduced. Sweden will contribute to the preservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Arctic. Environmental impact assessments and environmental assessments should be used to a greater extent. Networks of protected areas for flora and fauna should be established in the Barents region and elsewhere. Sweden will continue to be a leading research nation in the climate and environmental fields and will focus on the human impact of climate change.

Sweden's growth and competitiveness stand to benefit from increased free trade and active efforts to counter technical barriers to trade in the Arctic region. Sweden will work to ensure that the anticipated extraction of oil, gas and other natural resources occurs in an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable manner. It is important that the development of regional cross-border cooperation in the area of sea and air rescue continues. More stringent safety requirements must be imposed for maritime transportation and, in various sectors, use must be made of Sweden's environmental technology expertise. The Swedish Trade Council offices in Denmark, Norway, Finland, Russia, the United States and Canada, and in northern Sweden, should be instructed to build up skills to promote Swedish commercial interests in the Arctic. The tourism sector should be developed, albeit with consideration for the environment and the traditional lifestyles of indigenous peoples. Communications between tourist destinations should be improved in a sustainable manner. Swedish icebreakers are uniquely qualified to support Arctic research and monitor the vulnerable marine environment.

Sweden will work to bring the human dimension and the gender perspective to the fore in Arctic-related cooperation bodies. Measures will be needed to counteract the negative health and social impacts of climate change, pollutants and the expected increase in the exploitation of Arctic natural resources. The right of indigenous peoples to maintain and develop their identity, culture, knowledge transfer and traditional trades must be upheld. The Sami languages and other indigenous Arctic languages must be preserved. The Sami research programme should use Arctic-related cooperation projects to amplify the impact of research activities.

Facts on the Arctic Council

The Arctic Council was established in Ottawa in 1996 on the basis of a system of cooperation between Arctic environment ministers - the Rovaniemi Process - that started in 1991. The Council is an intergovernmental forum devoted to shared regional challenges facing the States and people concerned. Its main activities concern the protection of the Arctic environment and sustainable development as a means of improving the economic, social and cultural well-being of the inhabitants of the Arctic.

The Arctic Council consists of the eight Arctic States: Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. Six international organisations representing indigenous Arctic peoples have permanent participant status:
- Aleut International Association (the islands in the Bering Sea between the United States and Russia)
- Arctic Athabaskan Council (Canada and the United States)
- Gwich'in Council International (Canada and the United States)
- Inuit Circumpolar Conference (Greenland, Canada, the United States and Russia)
- Saami Council (Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia)
- Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (representing around fifty indigenous peoples in Russia).

The Chairmanship rotates between the eight Arctic States every two years. In
between the ministerial meetings, which conclude each Chairmanship, the work of the Council is led by a committee of officials consisting of representatives of the eight Arctic States and the six indigenous peoples' organisations (Senior Arctic Officials and Permanent Participants). The Council's activities are conducted in six working groups composed of representatives at expert level from sectoral ministries, government agencies and researchers. The working groups are: AMAP (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme), CAFF (Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna), PAME (Protection of Arctic Marine Environment), EPPR (Emergency Prevention, Protection and Response), SDWG (Sustainable Development Working Group) and ACAP (Arctic Council Action Plan). All working groups report to the SAO meeting and traditionally also to the foreign ministers meeting for approval of their mandates for the next two-year period. There are also 26 Observers (six states, nine inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary organisations, and eleven non-governmental organisations). There is a temporary secretariat in Tromsø, Norway. A more permanent secretariat will be established in 2013.

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Published 04 May 2011
Last updated 13 May 2013